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The world of animated films and comic art

Funnyworld

No. 20 $3.50

'The Black Cauldron': Disney Looks to the 1980's

Fifty Years of Disney Animation
Reviews: Watership Down
The Lord of the Rings

TEN YEARS OF ANIMATION

AND NOW WE'RE MOVING

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Editorial

By MIKE BARRIER

Funnyworld's subtitle is "The world of animated films and comic art," and some readers have groused that we are neglecting the second half of that subtitle. It's true that the last few issues have contained only a little comics-related material, and the same is true of this issue. That's not for lack of trying. For whatever reason, good material on animation has been much easier to find than good material on the comics.

Now the tide is turning. An extensive article on European comics and an interview with Will Eisner of *The Spirit* are in hand, and at least one—and perhaps both—will probably be ready in time for No. 21. Other articles have been promised, but not yet delivered. Without getting too specific, I can say that the drought of comics-related material should be broken in the near future.

For that matter, I am giving serious thought to expanding *Funnyworld*'s coverage in other ways, to embrace articles on subjects that are, in effect, just one step removed from the magazine's principal concerns, animation and comic art. Other areas of film history would fall into this category, as would children's literature. I have no intention of converting *Funnyworld* into any kind of "popular culture" magazine—the focus will always be on animation and the comics, as long as I am editor—but I think there is much to be said for expanding the magazine's horizons a little. I would be interested in hearing what *Funnyworld*'s readers think about this.

Carl Barks. The mechanics of getting a book into print are a bit more involved than I thought when I predicted, in No. 19, that *Carl Barks and the Art of the Comic Book* would be out early this year. The book's progress from typescript to printed page has been slower than I anticipated, although there is good reason to expect that it will be out sometime this year. Because publication of the book has been delayed, I have also delayed publication of the excerpt that was scheduled for this issue of *Funnyworld*.

Publications. *Zoetrope* originated last year as an animation newsletter in Chicago; with its third issue it has become a "publication of commercial and experimental media." The editors say that their "objective to provide an open forum in the form of a periodical for progressive design, photography, film making/animation news, and illustration by and for the greater Chicago and national professional media arts community including the interested public at large."

For the time being, though, *Zoetrope* remains an animation-oriented publication (the third issue, published in March, includes interviews with Mrs. Oskar Fischinger and Gordon Sheehan, a former animator for Max Fleischer), and well worth reading.

The newsletter will apparently be published on a roughly quarterly schedule, and it is distributed free of charge in Chicago. By mail, a year's subscription is $3.00 from *Zoetrope*, c/o Larry Janiak, 655 W. Irving Park Rd., Chicago, Ill. 60613.

Meanwhile, *The Spirit* continues to wind its way from publisher to publisher. Revived as an underground

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Front cover © 1978 Walt Disney Productions

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comic book in 1973 by Denis Kitchen, then published by Warren for sixteen issues, and now, since last year, back with Kitchen, who this time is reprinting the classic Will Eisner stories in a full-size (8½ x 11) format like that of the Warren magazines.

As I have said before, *The Spirit* is about the only current comics publication that I can read with any enjoyment. Will Eisner had his ups and downs—maybe more of the latter than the former—but he was rarely boring, and that is an impressive feat. Kitchen is now accepting subscriptions to the magazine, at $6.00 for four issues. The address is Kitchen Sink Enterprises, Box 7, Princeton, WI 54968.

Errata. There were two errors in captions for photos in *Funnyworld* No. 19. On page 3, Frank Moser is the man on the far left, not the far right. On page 34, the names of four persons in the back row in the photo of the Kansas City Film Ad reunion were accidentally omitted. The caption should have read: "Standing left to right are Dick Clinton, Friz Freleng (the Warner cartoon director), Clark "Butch" Davis, unidentified, Jimmy Lowerre, C.G. Maxwell, Ub Iwerks, unidentified, George W. Miller, Lawrence Goble, James H. Craig, unidentified (bending over), J.B. "Bugs" Hardaway (a story man at the Schlesinger and Lantz studios), unidentified, and Melvin "Tubby" Millar (also a story man at Hollywood cartoon studios)."

The caption for the photo of the Laugh-O-gram building on page 28 is misleading, as David R. Smith, the author of the article on Laugh-O-grams, has pointed out (the vagueness in the caption was my fault, and not his). "The Forest Inn Cafe, owned by the Raggos brothers, is not on the corner (that is a drug store) but rather at the far right," Smith writes. "You can see the 'Cafe' sign above, and can barely read the name of the cafe on the window on the ground floor."

Letters to Mike Barrier

The featured article in Funnyworld *No. 19 was an interview with Richard Williams, the Canadian-born director and animator, by Milton Gray. That interview provoked more comments than anything else in No. 19, including some from Williams himself.*

From RICHARD WILLIAMS: Many thanks to both you and Milt Gray for your sympathetic coverage on our Jovan commercial and approach in general.

It really is ironic that a thirty-second advertising commercial is recovering my besmirched reputation from the *Raggedy Ann* fiasco.

There is only one thing that I would like to point out. *The Thief and the Cobbler* [an animated feature on which Williams has been working for many years] *may*, in fact (although I don't believe it for an instant) come out "stillborn" after all these years—but you say it has been "deliberately postponed." Actually, we have been pushing as hard as is humanly possible to deliberately advance the picture.

We invest a minimum of $200,000 yearly in *The Thief*—all of which we have to earn from our commercial output. We always have a large crew chewing away at the picture. So far, we have spent $1.5 million on it (our own money). Does *that* represent a psychological block? I would call it putting one's money where one's mouth is.

Fully financed from a reputable outside source we would take anouther two years to complete *The Thief*. Subsidizing it ourselves, who knows how long it will take? It will be done when it's done.

But as for a psychological block—forget it.

Don't you have similar problems funding and running *Funnyworld*?

It's the same thing.

P.S. I heard an interview with Joseph Heller, and when the man said, "You took ten years writing *Catch-22* and more than ten years on *Something Happened* . . . why do you take so long and how do you feel about that?"

Heller said: "What's the rush?"

My rush is that Ken Harris is 80, Grim Natwick is in his 90's, and Art Babbitt is 70—so we want *them* to see the thing finished. But done right.

P.P.S. Know any millionaire gamblers who will finance an *un*-presold story?

As Dick Williams indicates in his letter, he was the director of Raggedy Ann & Andy, *an animated feature whose boxoffice failure (and it is generally conceded that the film was a failure artistically, too) has accentuated the bitterness felt by many of those who worked on it. Shamus Culhane, a veteran animator and director who has spent more than fifty years in the business, was the production manager for the film, and he wrote to take sharp issue with Williams' comments on* Raggedy Ann *in the interview and with some of my own comments in the introduction to the interview. His comments were submitted in the form of an article—and are of article length—but they fit most comfortably into the letters column, which is devoted to responses to previous issues.*

From SHAMUS CULHANE: When I first flipped through *Funnyworld* No. 19, I saw that a good part of the content was devoted to the work of Dick Williams. When I settled down to read it, I realized that I was seeing the beginning of a myth.

The story of the brave creative artist, Dick Williams, battling the forces of crass commercialism who were trying to destroy his art, and sadly enough in this case he lost. A very popular format for a story. To attempt to dispel such a myth is difficult. All the leverage is on the side of the folk-hero. However, in the interest of those people who worked so hard in spite of an atmosphere of utter confusion, and for those who advanced money in good faith in the pursuit of quality, I take up the cudgel.

The first item that caught my eye was the bit about Williams doing clean-ups and in-betweens on *Raggedy Ann*, and the observation that it was unusual. Damn right it was unusual! It is as if General Eisenhower stood at a Red Cross canteen during the Battle of the Bulge handing out doughnuts! With the picture $2 million over the original

budget, and months behind schedule, the last place a director should be is at a drawing board doing in-betweens.

Why one should think that Williams is better than Disney because he is a superior draftsman leaves me puzzled. Williams happens to be one of the best draftsmen in the history of animation. Disney once boasted that he couldn't hold a job in his own animation department. His metier was his ability to punch through a story problem with unerring accuracy, and then often supply the missing ingredient. His intuitive choice of the right man for a particular job was amazing.

It paid off during the final days of production on *Snow White*. With the Bank of America breathing down his neck, Walt kept the staff working with a desperate sense of urgency, but we never saw any panic or confusion. Contrast this with *Raggedy Ann* and the hundreds of story sketches made to no purpose, animators doing their own layouts, and a mountain of cels which were repainted because of changes in color schemes. The contrast between Disney and Williams in feature production is more to the point.

I submit that Dick Williams is presently making some of the most artistic spots on television, and some of his short subjects are rightly called milestones in the entertainment field. But these projects can be produced by a handful of people, and the eccentricities and short comings of the director can be tacitly by-passed or adjusted by his fellow workers. The inability or unwillingness to work in a detailed or methodical manner is of minor importance in the production of a small film, but becomes a major factor in feature production. What could result in a loss of a few hundred dollars on a short picture could become a $2 million loss on a feature.

Now on to the Gray-Williams interview. Every director makes mistakes, and because of the nature of his position they are often costly. As a director, or any good executive for that matter, one must accept the onus of an error unblinkingly, and concentrate on how it happened and why. That way one matures and becomes more expert in the field, and probably a little more understanding when other people make mistakes. A desperate search for a whipping boy is to my mind an unlovely alternative. Nowhere in the Gray-

From Raggedy Ann & Andy *(1977), directed by Richard Williams.*

Williams interview do I find any theme other than full blame laid on others, and it is done with the skill of long practice.

A case in point is that the neat way Dick says that he took on a $4.5 million picture in order to become "bankable." He did not take on a $4.5 million film. The budget was $2.5 million. Later, at his insistence, $2 million was added to the budget. Much of this money went into overtime and other items that had no place in the original budget or the schedule.

He goes on to say that he learned that "whoever has the gold makes the rules." Obviously, rules were meant to be broken, because, by a dazzling display of salesmanship, Williams managed to coax the additional $2 million out of the sponsor during the course of the production. Hardly a controlling move on the part of the gold-holders! Rather it was a gesture of belief in Williams' abilities.

He further complains that he was stopped or hindered in his work. Quote, "they can control the story, the way you work, fire the key people if they want, bring in idiots," etc. A very serious accusation. In fact, Williams was never stopped from hiring any artist who took his fancy and some of them were paid enormous salaries at his urging. At no time was his request for a particular artist turned down. It is true that some key people were dropped during the production but only after their output had dwindled to the vanishing point for weeks on end. The phrase "bring in idiots" perhaps alludes to the fact that in the last few months of work dozens of art school students were brought in to finish the opaqueing. This was in a frantic effort to finish the film, which was by that time months behind schedule.

But that pile-up of work was anticipated very early in production because the picture began to fall behind schedule. We had from the first a detailed format of figures and dates to control the work flow. There was nothing in the schedule that could not have met these specifications under normal conditions. Yet the problem was blithely ignored, or there were promises of an avalanche of work that never happened.

As for the "silly contract" that specified that Williams worked at his own studio in London for two weeks and then flew back to work in New York or Hollywood for the next two weeks, that was obviously Dick's own condition of employment. He was not the one who was "trapped" as he so dramatically put it. Nobody familiar with the intricacies of animation direction would have allowed such an absurd situation to exist even on a ten-minute short.

The idea that Williams was hired as some kind of "supervisor," as he says in the interview, is simply not true. I never heard him call himself anything else but the director, and he was addressed the same way by everybody else. He insinuates that he more or less fell into the job of directing by some kind of default. Hogwash! This would indicate that some kind of directorial procedure was first contemplated and then abandoned. That never happened.

As for the production meetings that Dick complains about, I ask the obvious question: what kind of studio operates without production meetings?

It is true that most of the production meetings were not useful. They more often than not were used as a sounding-board to explain away the dribble of work that was coming out in tandem with a soaring schedule of expenses. These explanations were so hotly defended that management backed off rather than risk a head-on clash with the most prestigious director in the field.

In this issue of *Funnyworld* the producer, Dick Horner, is characterized as "inept." The dictionary definition of inept is "not sensible, or foolish." I don't think Horner is an inept producer. Rather he is a producer of great ability in another field, Broadway plays. He came to this feld completely ignorant of animation production methods. His mistake was that when problems arose he consistently chose to abide by Dick Williams' interpretation of them. It was a case of too little control rather than too much. His decision to remove Williams from his position of director seems to have been long overdue. On the other hand, who can blame him for his reluctance? He just did not have the back ground to properly evaluate such a move in the face of an even worse dislocation of the schedule, the effect on the morale of the crew, etc. Even the most experienced producer would have had understandable trepidation.;

The decision to add $2 million to the budget was to my mind a tremendous mistake. Perhaps a compelling tribute to Williams' charisma, but not a sound evaluation of the possible returns on the film. *Raggedy Ann* was written as a picture for small children, not even teenagers. There is no material in the script that would assuage the adult's understandable boredom, unlike the Disney features, which are family cartoons. Therefore it will play to a limited market. It may be years before *Raggedy Ann* reaches a break-even point.

It serves no useful purpose to accept a myth about the reasons for *Raggedy Ann* turning into what is probably the biggest bomb in animation history to date. What is more to the point is that there are several lessons to be learned from this debacle, and they deserve to be enumerated.

The Disney system of having one man at the head, and under him a group of sequence directors who in turn are in charge of head animators, seems to be the best method of keeping quality control in a completely orderly manner.

Allowing the key figure in this hierarchy to be absent for long periods is obviously unworkable.

Working on a feature with two groups of artists separated by thousands of miles is inefficient and almost automatically leads to being bogged down by the thousands of details which are an inherent part of production.

Unless the director knows marketing and the methods by which a film is sold, and understands the method of computing its profit potential, he should have no voice in deciding on the initial budget. What he should decide is whether or not he can produce the film within the budget. If he thinks he can't, then the burden should be on the producer to add to the budget or get another director.

The producer needs a production manager who has sufficient knowledge of production methods to allow him to

A model sheet for The Thief and the Cobbler, *Williams' uncompleted feature.*

evaluate expenditures in every area of production. When additional money is asked for by the director the question should be discussed in terms of artist merit versus the budget. The final decision must be the result of a presentation to the producer, with the pros and cons delivered in level-headed not pejorative terms.

Remember that Roy Disney stopped Walt from remaking the palsied prince sequence during the final stages of *Snow White*. Walt reluctantly agreed when Roy pointed out that there was no money left for retakes. So the sequence is, to this day, an optical insult compared to the rest of the picture. Suppose Walt had not agreed, just gone on and spent the money anyway? We might very well be seeing reissues of *Snow White*, the property of the Bank of America, with the Disney Studio just a wistful memory. A Pyrrhic victory of artistic integrity over crass commercialism! We need that kind of thinking like I need a duodenal ulcer.

Finally, in what might seem like a complete reversal, I predict that Dick Williams' *The Thief* is going to be a highly successful motion picture. I have seen some sequences in penci test form over the years. It is some of the funniest animation Ken Harris or anybody else has ever done, with marvelous layout drawings by Dick Williams.

There is a good reason for my confidence in this venture. *The Thief* has been slowly evolving over a period of many many years, one sequence at a time. It has been done with a very small group that has worked as a unit for a long time. It is the kind of atmosphere that gives free rein to Dick Williams' spontaneity, his drawing ability, and his extraordinary sense of entertainment, coupled with his charismatic leadership of small groups.

Don't think that writing this has been easy. It is a difficult acrobatic feat to put the laurel wreath on a hero's head while giving him a boot in the rear at the same time.

Kitty Belendez, the national advertising manager for J.S. Staedtler, Inc., manufacturers of drafting and writing materials, has pointed out an error in the Williams interview.

From KITTY BELENDEZ: We read with interest the interview of Richard Williams by Milton Gray. We were very surprised to read the erroneous statement by Mr. Williams that our Mars-Omnichrom pencils have been discontinued. We certainly don't know where he gets his information. Contrary to this belief, the Mars-Omnichrom pencils are still being widely marketed throughout the United States and most parts of the world.

In reference to Mr. Williams' statement that the Mars-Omnichrom has been used for marking people for operations: this could be true, but we do not advocate this pencil for that use. Surgeons generally use a liquid substance (such as iodine) for marking, or specially-made surgical markers.

'Building a Better Mouse'

Fifty Years of Disney Animation

The animated cartoon was born the stepchild of the motion picture. The first true animation studios began producing short cartoons around 1913—precisely the time when the movie industry was shifting its attention from short subjects to features. For the next fifteen years, no one took cartoons very seriously. Most animated films were mass produced, filled with stiff, repetitive, unnatural animation and uninspired gags. Some cartoons, like the Felix the Cat series, held their heads a little above the crowd, but it is hard to detect any enthusiasm for animation among critics or the public at large in the days of the silent cinema.

That changed in 1928. From then until the United States entered World War II, animated cartoons grew—both in content and in public esteem—at a remarkably fast pace. It was as if the entire development of the motion picture between *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) and *Citizen Kane* (1941) had been compressed into little more than a dozen years. Animated cartoons started that low and climbed that high.

Walt Disney was the author of this change. He was preceded by a few distinguished names—Winsor McCay chief among them—and joined by others, notably the constellation of directors—Tex Avery, Bob Clampett, Chuck Jones, and others—who shaped the Warner Brothers and MGM cartoons in the forties and fifties. But the earlier animators would be forgotten without Disney as their heir and the later directors could never have produced what they did without Disney as their father. Disney made the difference, and to tell the story of Hollywood animation is, even now, to tell the story of Walt Disney and his studio. As Chuck Jones, the Warner Brothers cartoon director, has said, "Practically every tool we use today was originated at the Disney studio—not necessarily by Walt, but his men couldn't have originated them unless he had encouraged them to exist." [1]

Disney opened his Hollywood studio in 1923, and during the next five years made two cartoon series—"Alice Comedies," starring a real little girl, and "Oswald the Lucky Rabbit" cartoons. When Disney's distributors took Oswald from him, he and his principal animator, Ub Iwerks, made two silent cartoons with a new character, Mickey Mouse. Then Disney made a bold decision: he would set the two silent Mickeys aside and make a Mickey with a soundtrack. The cartoon was called *Steamboat Willie*, and its action took place on a stern-wheeler with a cast made up of Mickey, his girlfriend Minnie, and the gruff cat captain of the boat.

Steamboat Willie opened on November 18, 1928, at the Colony Theater on Broadway, where a number of Disney's Oswald cartoons had been shown earlier. *Steamboat Willie* was the first cartoon with a fully synchronized soundtrack—sound effects, music, voices, the works—and it was well received by audiences and critics. *Variety's* reviewer wrote: "Giggles came so fast at the Colony they were stumbling over each other."

Part of *Steamboat Willie* had been seen by its most important audience a few months earlier, at the Disney studio on Hyperion Avenue in Los Angeles. Wilfred Jackson, then a fledgling animator and later a director for Disney, recalled that memorable evening many years later:

Walt didn't know if people would believe that the character on the screen was making the noise. Nobody had ever seen a drawing make a noise, and there was no reason to be sure that the people would believe it. It might just look like some kind of a fake thing, and Walt wanted it to seem real, as if the noise was coming right from what the character was doing. So to

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For almost three months, from November 21, 1978, until February 28, 1979, the Library of Congress honored the art of animation (and Mickey Mouse, on his fiftieth anniversary) with an exhibition devoted to the Disney studio's greatest achievements. Mike Barrier, the editor of Funnyworld, *was curator of the exhibition and wrote the catalog essay. The essay is reprinted here.*

The illustrations that accompany the essay are of two kinds: items that were included in the exhibit and photos of Walt Disney. All illustrations are © Walt Disney Productions.

find out whether the whole thing would be believable, and acceptable, when a few scenes had been animated—enough to make a little sequence that could be run—they set up this test. I was able to play a few simple tunes on a harmonica; that was the most of a musician anybody was at the studio, at that time. One of my favorite tunes was "Turkey in the Straw"; that's why it got used there. And "Steamboat Bill" was a tune that Walt had in mind, in connection with the making of the picture. So those two melodies were planned.

The first little sequence where the steamboat comes down the river, around the bend, and Mickey's up there, and toots the whistle—that first little sequence of scenes was what we had made. While work was being done on the rest of the picture, Walt had these scenes inked and painted and photographed and put together. We came back one night to try this thing out, and Ub Iwerks rigged up a little microphone and speaker out of something or other that he took apart and put back together. Walt's office had a glass window in the door, so we could close the door, and look through it, and see the back of the screen. The screen was a bedsheet that was hung up in this long room where the backgrounds were painted. Roy Disney [Walt's older brother and the studio's business head] got outside the building with the projector, and projected through a window, so the sound of the projector wouldn't be too loud.

When Roy started the projector up, I furnished the music, with my mouth organ . . . and the other fellows hit things and made sound effects. We had spittoons everywhere then, and they made a wonderful gong if you hit them with a pencil. We practiced with it several times, and we go so we were hitting it off pretty well. We took turns going out there ourselves, and looking at the thing, and when I went out, there wasn't any music, but the noises and the voices seemed to come from it just fine. It was really pretty exciting, and it did prove to us that the sound coming from the drawing could be a convincing thing. So Walt went ahead and finished it.[2]

Drawings by Walt Disney himself, from 1917.

Steamboat Willie was not the first cartoon with a soundtrack. The Fleischer brothers had made some experimental sound cartoons a few years earlier, and at least one sound cartoon—Paul Terry's Aesop's Fable called *Suppertime*—had been released in 1928, shortly before *Steamboat Willie*. But, as a contemporary review put it, *Steamboat Willie* was "the first animated cartoon made especially for sound production, and as such it illustrates the perfection of synchronization that is possible when pictures are constructed especially for sound accompaniment."[3]

In other words, *Steamboat Willie* had a soundtrack that meant something. The characters moved in time to the music, and they seemed to be making the noises—the yelps and groans, the bangs and crashes—that the audience heard. Sound was used for comic effect: when a goat swallowed some sheet music, Minnie turned his tail as if it were an organ-grinder's crank and "Turkey in the Straw" issued from the goat's mouth.

Seeing it now, we laugh as much at *Steamboat Willie's* crudeness as at its gags. But in 1928 it was a very special film, "a peach of a synchronization job" as *Variety* put it. *Steamboat Willie* appeared at a time when talk was starting to spread like a wet, gray blanket over live-action movies, suffocating them in staginess, dullness, and a host of other cinematic sins. For a while, the Disney cartoons—with their music and action and rambunctious gags—were the freshest things on the screen. And for quite a while, they were virtually without competition from other cartoon studios. It wasn't until early in 1930 that other cartoon producers began turning out sound cartoons in earnest. By then the Mickey Mouse series and its companion the Silly Symphonies were well established and poised for more leaps forward.

This was the pattern that Walt Disney followed, from 1928 until World War II. He responded to challenges—whether they came from improvements in motion picture technology, or from the goals he set for himself, or from fortuitous accidents—in ways that expanded animation's possibilities.

A publicity photo from when Disney was making the "Alice" series.

Mickey Mouse, whose fiftieth anniversary we observe in 1978, was the vehicle for Disney's early success, and he eventually became the symbol for the entire Disney organization. Mickey was usually most visible where Disney's interest was keenest. It has now been twenty-five years since the last Mickey Mouse theatrical short subject, *The Simple Things* (1953), was released. Since then, Mickey has been the host of the *Mickey Mouse Club* in the mid-fifties, when Disney was taking the plunge into television (which other motion picture producers had shunned), and has played a similar role at both Disneyland and Walt Disney World.

Mickey Mouse has never been a character with a clearly defined personality. He was born at a time when no one knew how to make one cartoon character different from another, except through such limited devices as Felix the Cat's pacing and Farmer Al Falfa's spinning runs. In the twenties, cartoon characters evern looked alike; both Mickey and Felix had white masks on very simply designed black bodies, and Paul Terry's cartoons were filled with mice who would have looked like Mickey's close kin if only their snouts had turned up instead of down. Oswald, Mickey's predecessor in the Disney cartoons, looked a lot iike Mickey and acted a lot like him too. Even though *Steamboat Willie* was a giant step away from the formulas of the silent cartoons, Mickey Mouse was a formula character.

Oddly, Mickey's vagueness as a character became an asset—a source of his popularity. However difficult he might be to describe, he was undeniably an active, positive character, and this was very important at a time when the world was sliding into the worst days of the Great Depression. Audiences could read into him an optimistic affirmation of their own values.

The praise for Mickey was often extravagant. Here is what movie historian Terry Ramsaye said about Mickey in 1932:

> *Mickey Mouse is the crystalline, concentrated quintessence of that which is peculiarly the motion picture. He is at one with the Great Common Denominator of the great common art of the commonality in terms of expression, while in production he is a logarithmic derivation of the whole of screen technology . . . . The irrepressible Mickey in charmingly typical expression of his own psychology, which is based on the principle of the triumph of the boob, the cosmic victory of the underdog, the might of the meek, has in a very certain sense paid tribute to Mr. Chaplin by becoming his successor in certain considerable sectors of the world of the motion picture.*[4]

Left, a cel and original background painting from Steamboat Willie *(1928). Right, Walt Disney with one of the first Mickey Mouse books.*

Measuring such tributes against the cartoons themselves is likely to produce puzzlement: most of the Mickey Mouse cartoons of the late twenties and early thirties have simply not held up very well. The earliest ones are creaky antiques, the later ones never escape their formula origins, even at their most polished. It was not until the mid-thirties, when Mickey began to share the stage with characters like Donald Duck, that he appeared in cartoons of really high quality.

But we do not see the early Mickeys with the eyes of depression audiences and, most importantly, we do not see them as they were released month by month—each one a little better in some way than its predecessor. At a time when everything else seemed to be getting worse and worse, it must have been a little reassuring to know that something—even the animated cartoon—was clambering steadily upward.

It is this great residue of good feeling from the early thirties, more than anything else, that accounts for Mickey Mouse's popularity today, long after the other cartoon characters of the time have faded into obscurity. The Disney studio has kept Mickey before the public, but it is the public's fondness for Mickey that has kept him alive and that promises to keep him alive for many years longer.

There was concrete evidence of Mickey's popularity in the early thirties, in the form of the sales of Mickey merchandise—books, toys, games, dolls, even jewelry—an endless variety of products. In one celebrated instance, sales of a tiny handcar with Mickey and Minnie as passengers rescued the Lionel Corporation, the model train manufacturer, from bankruptcy. Another spinoff from the cartoons had independent worth: the Mickey Mouse newspaper strip of the thirties, written and drawn by Floyd Gottfredson, was at least on a par with the animated cartoons from which it was derived. Later, in the forties and fifties, the same thing happened with the Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge comic books written and drawn by Carl Barks—the comic-book ducks were more interesting than the ducks on the screen.

The most important effect of Mickey Mouse's success, on the screen and in the stores, was that Disney gained a financial cushion that was not available to other cartoon producers. He was in a better position to take chances than they were, and he took one in 1932 when he began making the Silly Symphonies in three-color Technicolor.

As with the 1928 introduction of sound, it is difficult today to appreciate what a novelty three-color Technicolor was in 1932. Earlier experiments with color had been generally unsuccessful, and the movie industry was chary of the new process. Disney gave Technicolor a showcase, and in return he was given the exclusive right to use the three-color process in cartoons for two years.

The color in the earliest Silly Symphonies is not outstanding and some of it is downright muddy. But as with the early Mickeys, the color Sillys shone by comparison with what was otherwise available. Exhibitors responded to the color Silly Symphonies with tremendous enthusiasm, and that series—which had suffered from its lack of continuing characters—suddenly enjoyed an edge over the competition. That edge was greatly enhanced when, less than a year after color was added to the Symphonies, Disney released *Three Little Pigs*—a cartoon that benefited not only from bright, posterlike colors, but from the first hit song to be derived from an animated cartoon, Frank Churchill's "Who's Afraid

of the Big Bad Wolf." The color Silly Symphonies so dominated all other cartoon series that they won every Academy Award for animated films from 1932 (when the first Oscar for a cartoon was awarded to *Flowers and Trees*) until 1939, the year that the series was discontinued.

The Silly Symphonies had been initiated with *Skeleton Dance* in 1929, six months after Mickey Mouse's debut. In the Sillys as in the Mickeys, the music and the animation were closely knit and everything was animated to a beat. In the Mickeys, however, the musician generally deferred to the animator, whereas in the Sillys the musician had the upper hand.

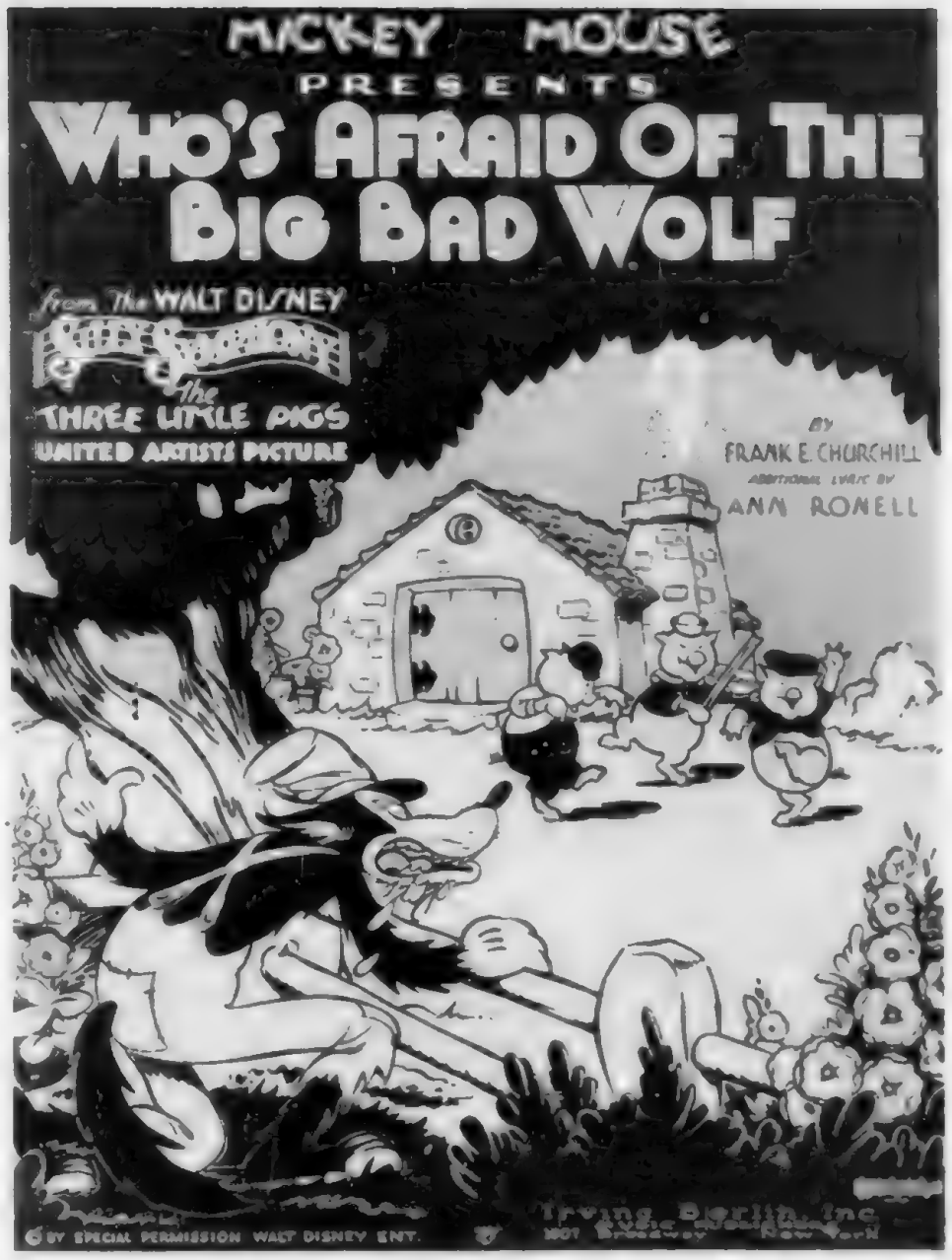
The difference between the two series was not marked in the early years, since in Mickeys and Sillys alike there was a lot of bouncing around to rather primitive music. For a while, it was the synchronization of music and image that mattered most, whether the cartoon on the screen was a Mickey or a Silly.

But by the time the color Symphonies were well under way, this had changed. For one thing, sound technology had made great strides and subtleties in music, dialogue, and sound effects that had been beyond Disney's reach a few years earlier were possible. As in other instances, Disney was not slow to take advantage of these improvements. He set up a separate sound effects department and began giving the characters distinctive voices. Most notable was Donald Duck, who first appeared in a 1934 Silly Symphony called *The Wise Little Hen* and who rapidly became as popular as Mickey Mouse himself.

The change in the soundtracks for the Silly Symphonies cannot be attributed solely to improvements in recording techniques, however. In many of the Sillys, especially those with music by Leigh Harline, complete and rather complex musical thoughts were being expressed. The music itself was not always distinguished—it frequently echoed the cream-puff music of the Broadway stage in the twenties—but it was not twisted and bent to accommodate the animation. In the Mickey Mouse series, by contrast, "gymnastics"—music that followed wherever the animation led—was the order of the day. Significantly, though, *The Band Concert* (1935), the first Mickey Mouse cartoon in color and the best of all the Mickeys, was directed by Wilfred Jackson, the principal director of the Silly Symphonies, and was built around classical music—Rossini's *William Tell* Overture. The action in *The Band Concert* is incredibly intricate and detailed, particularly in the climactic moments when Mickey's band is carried away by a tornado, but everything is worked out within the framework provided by the music.

Through this handling of music and animation, Disney was in effect setting the stage for his first feature-length cartoon. Short cartoons can be bright and intense; musical gymnastics are appropriate for such cartoons. But a cartoon of feature length imposes different requirements on its makers—its rhythms must be longer and deeper so that the audience is not exhausted by what it sees and hears before the cartoon's seventy or eighty minutes are up.

Disney was already giving considerable thought to his first feature, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, more than



three years before its premiere. In October 1934 an outline was distributed in the studio with the meat of the story as it eventually appeared on the screen. Five of the Seven Dwarfs had already been named.

It was presumptuous for Disney to be thinking of making a feature then, even though his cartoons had undergone vast changes in the six years since *Steamboat Willie*. In 1934 Disney's artists were still not capable of the kind of animation that could sustain an audience's interest over the length of a feature. Changes less visible and audible than those in color and music were laying the groundwork for *Snow White's* great success.

These changes can be summed up by saying that the Disney artists were becoming more specialized. In the late twenties, an animator would draw not only the "extremes," the key drawings that determine the shape of a movement, but also the "in-betweens," the drawings necessary to fill out an action so that it is smooth on the screen. He would also sketch the backgrounds for his scenes, so they could be rendered by a background painter. Since he would probably get only rudimentary instructions about how to animate the scene, he would in effect have to write part of the story as well. It was a little like expecting a screen actor not only to commit a large part of a script to memory every day but also to design sets and write dialogue.

Gradually these conditions changed. In 1931 Disney began hiring layout men, artists who designed the backgrounds and

gave the animators sketches of the characters in their proper positions. An animator could depart from such sketches if he wished—indeed, he was expected to—but he did not have to start from scratch.

Disney at some point in the early thirties began insisting that his animators work in the rough—that is, make rough sketches instead of finished drawings. It would be less time-consuming to replace an unsatisfactory rough sketch than to replace a finished drawing. But more importantly, an artist making a rough sketch was more likely to think about the action he was animating than about the individual drawings themselves. It was the example of animator Norman Ferguson—who drew roughly and animated beautifully—that inspired Disney's edict. This was hard on some animators who were used to drawing with cookie-cutter crispness. A few of them continued to work in a precise way and then had their assistants add rough lines to their drawings. That was not what Disney had in mind.

The use of assistants for more legitimate purposes increased in the early thirties: more and more they drew the in-betweens so that the animators could concentrate on the most important drawings. Later, assistants began cleaning up the rough sketches. They gave animators the time to bring their drawings to life.

From left, the Librarian of Congress, Daniel Boorstin, and Mickey Mouse.

Retired Disney animator Ward Kimball autographs copies of the catalog.

The Disney animators were encouraged to draw more thoughtfully and to become better draftsmen. Distrust of academic training, which had been endemic in the early animation studios, faded at Disney's after Don Graham began teaching drawing there in 1932. At first the results of this training were sometimes awkward—animators fresh from life class would try to apply their anatomy lessons to Mickey Mouse—but as the Disney characters became more complex and realistic in design, good draftsmanship became more immediately useful. As the thirties wore on, an increasing number of artists came to the studio with strong drawing skills already among their credentials. The depression, by eliminating many jobs for artists, had created a pool of talent from which Disney drew freely.

Of course animation drawings are not seen individually but in what one director calls "flurries." One of Disney's most important steps was to let his animators—and himself—see those flurries at an early stage in production, when changes could still be made without spending a lot of money. For many years animators had checked their drawings by holding a stack of them in their hands and flipping them to see if the action looked smooth. Disney went one step beyond this. He had the rough pencil drawings shot and projected them. At first such tests were restricted to scenes that posed special problems, but by the mid-thirties everything was being shot in pencil. A scene might go through several pencil tests before the results were good enough for the scene to be ordered to ink and paint, where each drawing was traced on a clear sheet of celluloid and painted by hand.

Thanks in part to such repeated testing, the Disney cartoons came to be characterized by a balletic precision of timing. Cartoons like *The Band Concert, Clock Cleaners,* and *Mickey's Trailer*—to name only three Mickey Mouse cartoons of the middle and late thirties—are as sly and charming and beautifully crafted as eighteenth-century music boxes or cuckoo clocks; they surprise and delight us at every turn. Geppetto's toyshop in *Pinocchio* is the apotheosis of this kind of animation.

This gracefulness was the highest achievement of the

Black Tie, Ears, and Tails

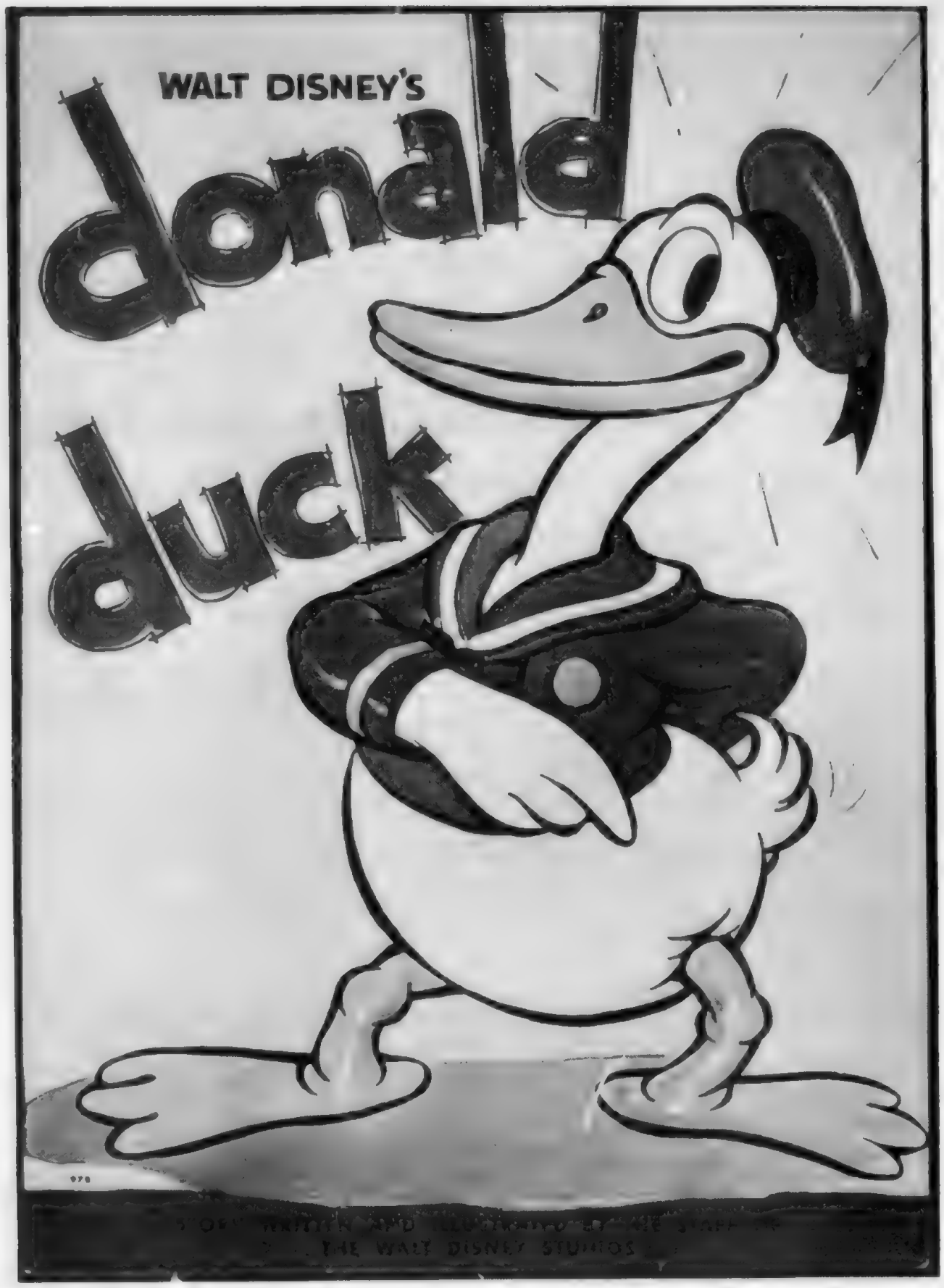
The night before the Disney exhibition, "Building a Better Mouse," opened to the public, a black-tie dinner in honor of the exhibit was held in the Library's Great Hall. The climax of the evening came when the diners joined in singing "Happy Birthday" to the guest of honor.

A portion of the exhibit itself: excerpts from Disney cartoons were shown on eight video screens.

The scene in the Great Hall.

Disney cartoons before *Snow White*. The delineation of personality received less attention. Many of the Disney characters had distinct personalities, of course—Donald Duck and Goofy come immediately to mind—but their personalities were painted in broad strokes. Donald could be summed up as short-tempered and belligerent, and Goofy as self-confident and stupid. Likewise, the development of personality was not what the Silly Symphonies were about. Characters like those in *The Tortoise and the Hare* were recognizable as types but not much more—and there was no reason for them to be more in the context of that cartoon.

Snow White demanded a vast improvement in character animation. First, two of the principal characters were humans who had to be drawn more or less realistically. Second, the menace was not a hammy comic villain like Mickey's nemesis Pegleg Pete but a genuinely evil character. the wicked Queen. And, third, the Seven Dwarfs had to be distinguished from one another and yet remain Dwarfs.



One of the earliest Donald Duck books, published by Whitman in 1935.

For years the Disney staff—writers, artists, Walt himself—chewed on the question of how to give these characters personalities that would be more than collections of tics. The animators would meet in the evenings to discuss the Dwarfs' personalities, and the transcripts of their discussions are filled with talk about how the Dwarfs should walk, how they should carry their bellies, how they should use their hands, and so on. For inspiration, the animators turned to the character actors who had provided the voices for the Dwarfs; some of them were photographed performing the Dwarfs' actions. Perce Pearce, one of the directors of *Snow White,* invoked the names of several film comedians to describe Dopey: "Dopey has some Harpo in him, and Walt says he is made up of Harry Langdon, a little bit of Buster Keaton, and a little trace of Chaplin in the fellow." [5]

Real animated "acting" is especially difficult to achieve because a character may be "played" by several different animators in the same picture and, likewise, each animator may play several different parts. For that reason, it is easy for animated acting to degenerate into a set of stock poses and expressions; the character looks and behaves pretty much the same throughout the picture, but there's nothing behind the gimmicks. In *Snow White,* by contrast, each of the Dwarfs emerged as a distinct personality.

The animators and directors had argued among themselves about whether they should start from the outside—picking out a few key characteristics for each Dwarf and building a personality from those—or from the inside—deciding what a Dwarf was like and letting his characteristics reflect that understanding of his personality. In fact they seem to have done both, so that the Dwarfs are vivid but not shallow. They are triumphs of caricature in appearance and in

movement.

A few key animators—notably Bill Tytla, Fred Moore, and Norman Ferguson—took the lead in developing the characters in *Snow White,* but it seems clear that it was Walt Disney's own intense involvement that made the difference. Everyone who worked on *Snow White* testifies to Disney's dedication to the picture; more than any other Disney feature, it reflects his wishes.

A high point of the film comes near the end, when the Dwarfs are gathered in mourning around the apparently dead Snow White. The Dwarfs' grief, as animated by Frank Thomas, is very convincing, especially Grumpy's. He is crushed almost beyond endurance, eyes wide with horror and disbelief. His grief is the more affecting because the story has prepared us for it; his attitude toward Snow White has changed as the film has progressed.

The saying goes that it is easy to make audiences cry and difficult to make them laugh, and yet every comedian yearns to play Hamlet. Nevertheless, until *Snow White,* animation's vocabulary was incomplete; after *Snow White,* it was possible for animation make audiences laugh *or* cry. In *Snow White* and in the four features that followed it—*Pinocchio* and *Fantasia* in 1940, *Dumbo* in 1941, and *Bambi* in 1942—Disney created many opportunities for virtuoso animation and, fortunately for us, had animators who could take advantage of those opportunities.

It is dangerous to list the high points in the early Disney features because there are so many candidates for inclusion, but any such list would probably include Bill Tytla's devil, Art Babbitt's dancing mushrooms, and John Lounsbery's balletic hippos and alligators in *Fantasia;* Ward Kimball's crows and Howard Swift's pink elephants in *Dumbo;* Wolfgang Reitherman's Monstro the whale, Tytla's Stromboli, and Eric Larson's Figaro the cat in *Pinocchio;* and Milt Kahl's key

scenes with Thumper in *Bambi*.

The Disney animators performed so well not only because their own skills had matured but because they were supported by hundreds of artists—story men, layout artists, background painters, character designers—who were equally skilled in their own specialties. Reitherman's animation of Monstro, for example, is effective in large part because other Disney artists did such a good job of shading the whale and giving him bulk. Much of *Fantasia* is visually splendid because dozens of artists had thoroughly explored the visual alternatives before animation was begun. At every level, a decade of recruiting and training had paid rich dividends. Not that these artists always worked together smoothly—quite the reverse. In fact, Disney seems to have encouraged conflict among them in the belief that it was artistically productive. There was harmony only where it counted, on the screen.

In the features that followed *Snow White*, as in that film, it is the moments of sorrow that demonstrate most powerfully how skilled the Disney animators had become. In *Dumbo* there is an affecting moment when Dumbo is reunited with his mother, who is caged and chained; in quicksilver animation by Bill Tytla, Dumbo's joy at the reunion turns to grief. In *Bambi*, the grief is likewise a child's; there are probably few people who saw *Bambi* as children who do not remember the trauma of the moment when Bambi is told that he will never see his mother again.

Disney as a polo player in the 1930's.

In all three films children or, in the case of the Dwarfs, childlike characters are separated from their mothers or, in *Snow White*, from a character who fills the mother's role. There is a similar situation in *Pinocchio*, when the title character seems to die while saving his father's life. All of these Disney features reflect children's deepest fears, but they do so honestly. They evoke profound emotions but do not cheapen them—they take them seriously.

Disney's animators had proved that they could deal with strong emotions, but the emotions they were permitted to depict tended to fall within a tight little circle. It is difficult to think of any instances in the early Disney features in which unmistakably adult characters displayed or evoked emotions as powerful as those surrounding the separation of parents and children in *Snow White*, *Dumbo*, and *Bambi*.

Disney's early features fell into definite patterns, not only in their reliance on plots that appealed most directly to children, but in their use of small, cute characters to win our sympathy and sustain our interest. If such creatures were not ready at hand in the literary source, they were invented. The Dwarfs—vague figures in the Grimm fairy tale—became distinct and lovable personalities. Their roles were filled in later films by the likes of Jiminy Cricket in *Pinocchio*, Timothy Mouse in *Dumbo*, and Thumper in *Bambi*. The characters themselves are delightful, but they represent an easy way out of the storyteller's dilemma: how to keep the audience listening to the tale he has to tell. What came to be regarded as typical Disney characters helped to solve that problem, but they also restricted each story's possibilities. And, after a time, it became the conventional wisdom that such characters were required for animation stories, that good animation stories, in other words, were necessarily children's stories.

If Disney had continued to develop in his animated features he could have put the lie to that belief—and there is reason to believe that he would have if circumstances had not dictated otherwise. In *Bambi* there is a sequence in which Bambi, Thumper, and Flower the skunk are smitten by females of their respective species. It is a striking mixture of shrewd observation and sticky cuteness, alternating rapidly in a few minutes of screen time. *Bambi* is full of such passages—the brilliant and the banal cheek by jowl—which reflect the confusion of artists in transition, not the mechanical dullness of cynical entertainers.

Disney had, by the time of *Bambi*, a corps of artists who were capable of more than he was asking of them. Starting in the mid thirties, he had pulled together a team of young animators who were almost entirely Disney-trained and who were prepared to give Disney whatever he wanted to see on the screen. They were, for the most part, superb draftsmen; they were capable of the fidelity to nature that a story like *Bambi* required. Beyond that, they could animate with such precision and delicacy that no subject matter was beyond their reach.

Looking at the early features now, it almost seems as if Disney was going to great lengths to avoid the questions his

animators' ability had posed for him: Where was the animated feature headed? Would it continue to be a vehicle for children's stories, or would it begin to deal with adult concerns in a distinctively animated way and so move into the movies' mainstream? Rather than deal with such questions, Disney fussed over the early features like a painter who is always adding another unnecessary brush stroke.

There was, for example, the multiplane camera, which was used to give a greater feeling of depth in some scenes. The backgrounds were painted on sheets of glass, in layers, and the camera seemed to move through and past these different layers, as if in a truly three-dimensional space. Sometimes, as at the opening of *Bambi*, the multiplane camea almost succeeded in transforming an animated scene into a pale reflection of live-action photography; on other occasions, it destroyed the illusion rather than contributing to it. In *Pinocchio*, for instance, there is a famous (and extremely expensive) shot in which the camera moves down into Geppetto's village. Not only is the shot afflicted by the jitters, but the village life we are shown is ordinary without being believable.

Fantasia, the third Disney feature, is the grandest example of how Disney evaded the issue of how far animation could go. *Fantasia* grew out of a Mickey Mouse short subject, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Before that short was completed, in 1938, Disney and Leopold Stokowski had decided to incorporate it into a feature-length program of several such pieces—animated images set to classical music. The result was a gigantic Silly Symphony, the quality of whose segments varied enormously. The segments based on light-hearted ballets such as *Dance of the Hours* and *The Nutcracker Suite* are splendid Disney, and those based on the highly pictorial music of *Night on Bald Mountain* or *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* are almost as good. Elsewhere, the images are mismatched or gratuitous and even embarrassing.

Fantasia is most interesting as a catalog of what the Disney artists could do at the time. The film is full of splendid character animation, startling special effects, subtleties of light and color—an unceasing demonstration that the Disney studio had become capable of bringing almost anything to life on the screen. But in *Fantasia*, as in scenes using the multiplane camera, the techniques themselves rather than the uses to which they are put command our attention.

Empty technique was not typical of Disney's films. Throughout the thirties, as his artists could do more he had found more for them to do. He had grown as an artist himself in order to use the improvements in his workers' skills and in animation's technology. But in the features, beneath the polished and charming surfaces, there is a great grinding and crashing of gears because Disney the technician was making such difficult demands on Disney the artist. He simply could not exploit all of the resources at his command without

Right, an early story sketch for Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs *(1937).*
Below, a model sheet for Snow White.

advancing far beyond the kind of film he was making at the time, and it seems likely that he found it difficult and even painful to take that step.

Events prevented him from ever taking it. When *Pinocchio* premiered in February 1940, the world was engulfed in war and Disney's foreign markets, which accounted for around half of his revenues, were virtually extinguished. *Snow White* had been enormously successful—it took in more money at the box office than any other film up to that time, with the possible exception of *Birth of a Nation*—and its success had spurred Disney to spend lavishly on new films. *Pinocchio* was far more costly than *Snow White*, but its reception was not nearly as warm. The studio was forced to write off a loss of $1 million on *Pinocchio*, and *Fantasia* also went quickly into the red when Disney had to cut short his plans for a carefully managed road-show release. *Dumbo* was successful, but *Bambi* (which was released in 1942 but had been essentially completed before the United Stated entered World War II) lost money on its initial release. *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia*, and *Bambi* have all moved solidly into the black in reissues, but that was, of course, no help to Disney in 1940 and 1941. He had aggravated his financial problems by spending heavily on a handsome new studio in Burbank, which was occupied early in 1940, just as *Pinocchio* was opening around the country.

Even though the walls were clearly closing in by the middle of 1940, Disney continued to push an ambitious program of features. It is remarkable, in fact, how many postwar films were in some stage of production before the war. *Lady and the Tramp*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, *The Wind in the Willows* (released as half of *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad*), *Mickey and the Beanstalk* (released as part of *Fun and Fancy Free*)—work was under way on all of these films before Pearl Harbor. Disney was preparing a sequel to *Fantasia* as late as March 1941, even though by then the prospects for such a large-scale project were dim.

Disney in action before a storyboard for Pinocchio *(1940).*

Disney examines plans for his new studio in Burbank.

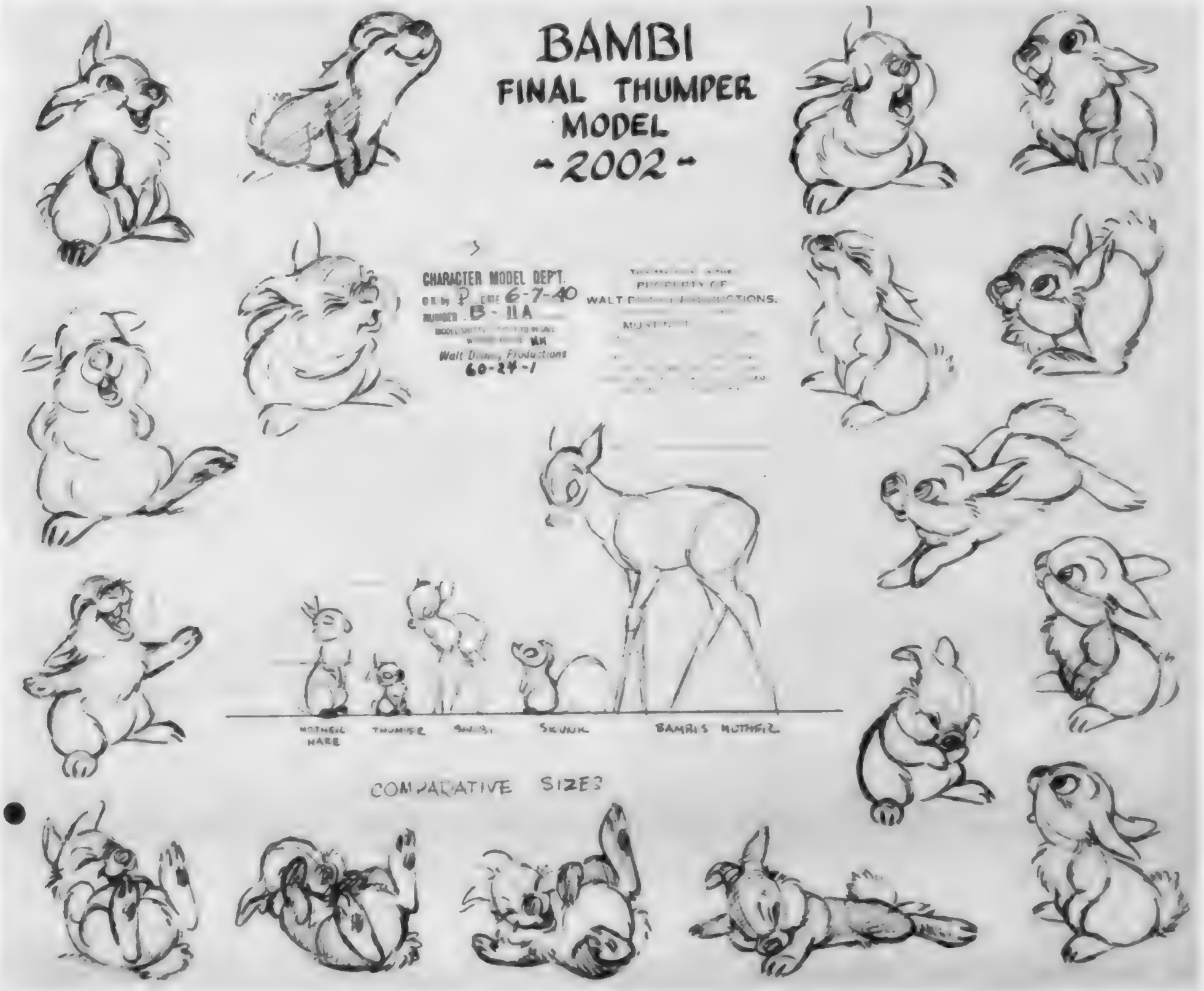
A story sketch by Bill Peet for Dumbo *(1941).*

In May 1941, several hundred Disney employees went on strike. The issues were money, layoffs, and recognition of the cartoonists' union. Neither side emerged from the two-month strike covered with glory, but Disney—seeing his studio in jeopardy—was bitter and belligerent. The strike cost the studio dearly, not least in the loss of the esprit de corps that is one of the fondest memories of the people who worked at Disney's when *Snow White* and *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia* were being made.

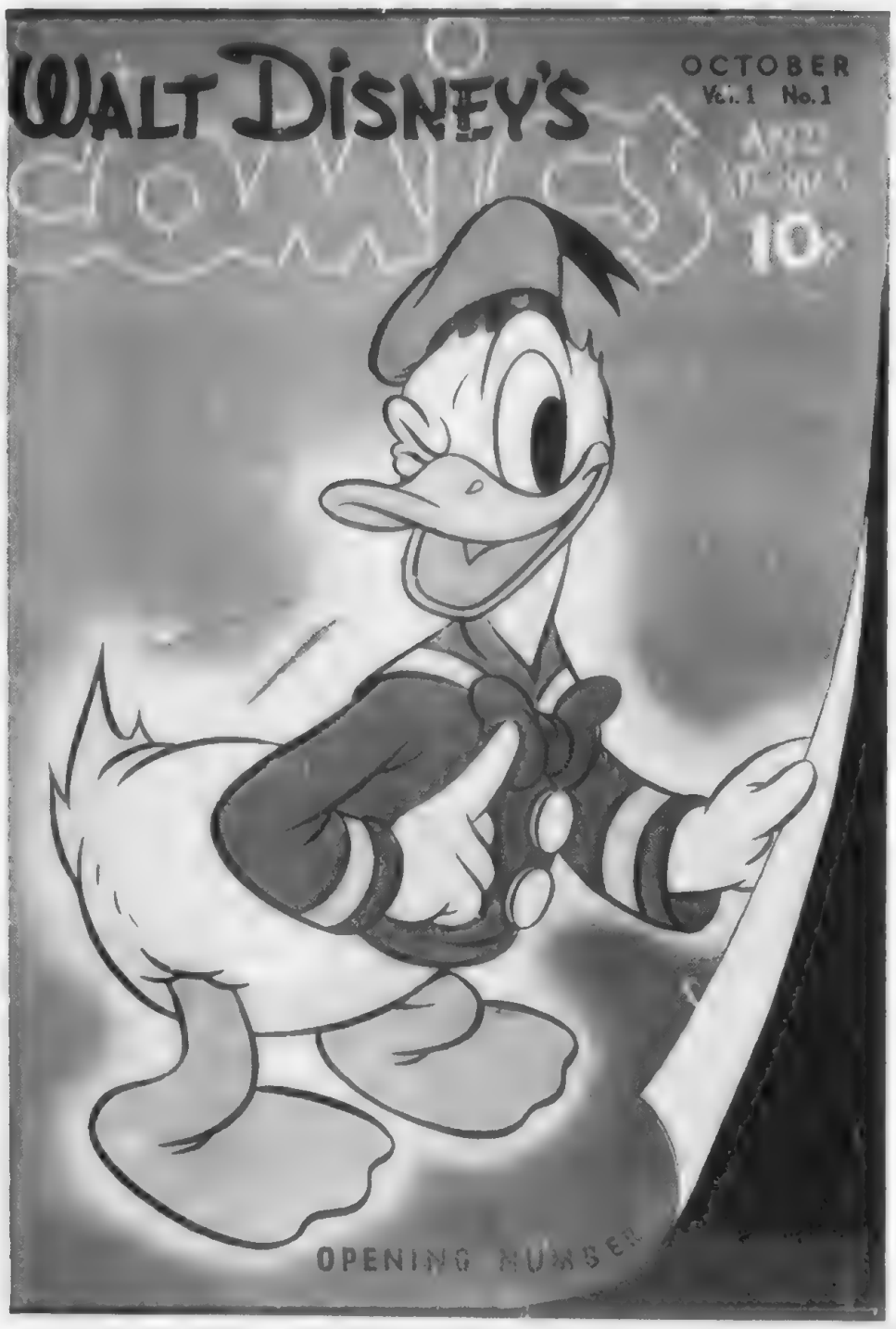
World War II was at once Disney's salvation and the final blow to any hopes that the bright promise of the early Disney features would be fulfilled. Almost immediately, more than 90 percent of the studio's production was for the military, bringing Disney much-needed money. All three of the features made during the war (*Saludos Amigos, Victory through Air Power, The Three Caballeros)* were, in some sense, propaganda films. They each contained brilliant episodes, like Ward Kimball's animation of the title song in *Caballeros,* but nothing more. It was not until almost five years after the war that Disney released a full-length cartoon (*Cinderella*) of the kind that had made his reputation.

Disney's momentum had first been slowed by the box office failures of *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia* and finally broken by the strike and the war. He regained his momentum after the war, but not in animation. He turned first to live-action features, then to television, and then to the theme parks. Those who

Above, Deems Taylor, Leopold Stokowski, and Disney at work on Fantasia *(1940). Below, a model sheet for* Bambi.



Disney and animator Eric Larson, surrounded by storyboards for Sleeping Beauty *(1959).*



worked for him in animation both before and after the war acknowledge that they saw much less of him in the later years; some of them say he talked of eliminating animation from the studio's activities. After the box office failure of *Sleeping Beauty* in 1959, dozens of Disney veterans were cut loose or steered into new careers at the studio.

The studio continued to make animated features throughout the postwar years and, despite Disney's diminished interest, standards were maintained—thanks mainly to the key animators known as the "nine old men" and to writer Bill Peet, who was a fertile source of Disney characters and stories. Some of the studio's later films were highly successful both critically and commercially: *Mary Poppins* (1964), a combination of animation and live action, is the outstanding example. But only rarely did the postwar features depart from the patterns established in the prewar classics. Walt Disney's heart and mind were elsewhere, and the postwar features, for all their excellences, show it.

Fortunately, the great Disney films survive to tell us how much was done and how much yet remains to be done. After forty years, Walt Disney's best films are still the yardstick against which all other character animation must be measured.

Notes

[1]Published interview with Chuck Jones by J. Michael Barrier, *Funnyworld,* no. 13, Spring '71.
[2]Author's interview with Wilfred Jackson, December 2, 1973.
[3]*Daily Review* [New York], November 19, 1928.
[4]*Motion Picture Herald* [New York], October 1, 1932.
[5]Transcript of a meeting of November 17, 1936, recording a discussion on the personalities of the dwarfs. (Walt Disney Archives).

A Column by Dick Huemer

The Bilking of Bunny

When I was growing up in Brooklyn, N.Y., the arrival of the Sunday edition of the *New York Journal* was easily the crowning event of the week. Ah! *Happy Hooligan!* Ahh! Those *Katzenjammer Kids!* And *Maude!*—that feisty mule who, at the slightest provocation, would kick every offender over the far distant horizon. I never questioned the ballistics of this feat—or ever failed to laugh at it. And, ah, yes. yes! YES!!!—gloriously and fantastically drawn, *Little Nemo in Slumberland!* In those innocent days of no radio, or TV, what a feast it all was.

Yet not altogether. For there was *one* comic strip that earned all the hatred my youthful being was capable of. It was miserably misnamed, *Foxy Grandpa*. Young as I was, and really not *too* discriminating, I could nevertheless discern that Grandpa couldn't compare with a retarded earthworm in foxiness, and was about as comic as the Johnstown flood. It (the strip) was executed—not a bad name for it—by someone with the improbably name of *Bunny* who always drew a cutesie li'l bunny rabbit next to his li'l ol' signature. Any inadvertent viewing of that loathed strip, merely in passing, was enough to almost unsettle my delicate stomach. I took things hard as a nipper, let me tell you.

In this regard, little did I suspect what ridiculous *contretemps* Fate was preparing for me. But let me first say that aside from becoming an animator when I grew up, I otherwise matured quite normally. And I animated enthusiastically, and faithfully, and yet—suspiciously. For I suspected that my seed had fallen upon most unstable ground. Alas! How right my instinct was! I was suddenly swept out of my job by the great animation drought of the mid-twenties—along with so many others of our tenuous calling.

Some of us castaways found havens in less glamorous and totally unrelated jobs; we all had hunger pains to assuage. So, lithography, fashion drawing, commercial art in various and sometimes repulsive guises (like decorating parchment lampshades, at a buck per)—I tried them all briefly and regretted that I hadn't gone to college.

And then, by sheer dumb luck, I found an opening with the Blackman Studios, an—to me at least—unknown outfit, ostensibly in the business of producing animated cartoons in the midst of a howling depression.

There were several surprises lurking in my new situation. In ascending order of impact: I first found out that I had hired on to the producers, of all things,—*Foxy Grandpa*!—that grand old clever trickster, ech! and the bane of my impressionable youth. But well, and good. In growing up I had acquired a certain tolerance toward things of which I disapproved. So if it was Foxy Grandpa they wanted, the poor dumb bastids, why, Foxy Granddaddy they would get! And serve them right!

Them! Ah! That concerned the Blackman brothers and

their spooky Dad—and that was surprise number two. My new employers, outwardly, gave me the impression of being small-town undertakers, black suits and all. They had a sort of built-in air of furtiveness, that gave promise of some kind of larceny—probably grand—or at the improbably least—petty. To look at their yeasty faces, I couldn't imagine what they were doing running an animation studio, especially in such awful times. They just didn't seem even remotely to be the type, at least not to *my* mind. Nor to a fellow animator either, one Bert Blankenship, who informed me early that the grisly group couldn't animate their arses. Blankenship was a heavy-set, robust and ruddy, typical, umbrella-carrying (and always misplacing) Britisher, not long over from Blighty. He had been at the studio for about a month before I came there, and considered himself an authority on the baleful buggers, as he referred to them. One thing we quickly agreed upon was that they sure as hell were up to something unkosher.

The *third* surprise, at least to me, concerned none other than darlin' ol' Bunny himself. It seems he had been operating all his comic strip years under the *Bunny* alias, and that his real name was Carl Schultz, and furthermore *he* was the angel who was supplying the manna for the Blackmans' weird operation.

Weird is right. For the *fourth* puzzlement was the mysterious locked door. The locked part was reasonably understandable. But the sign on the door was definitely not. Said sign fairly shrieked in large red letters: KEEP OUT! ON PAIN OF INSTANT DISMISSAL! What could possibly be in that forbidden room that could justify such threatening language? I cringed inwardly every time I passed that sign, since I was literally being eaten alive with curiosity and determination to unlock both door and mystery.

One day at lunch with Blankenship I asked him what *he*

thought about it. Bert was one of those commonest of Britishers, a funny bloke.

"Tell you what," joked he. "My guess is that it's jam-packed with all kinds of illegal flim-flams—like preferred stock certificates for the Great Transatlantic Tunnel, or 'bills of sale' for your blinkin' Statue of Liberty—"

"Or good old dependable gold bricks—"

"But seriously," Blankenship continued, "I've thought about it a great deal, and I've concluded that the room is packed full of bundles of our unprocessed animation. With the depressed state of the animation racket—bored and actually hostile audiences and theatre operators, it doesn't pay a producer to throw good money after bad. Obviously the B's are waiting for things to pick up."

"Actually," he went on, "What real evidence do we have that the Blackmans are up to some hanky-panky, eh? And as for Bunny Schultz—he seems as happy as the Easter Rabbit in an egg factory."

"I have to agree," said I. "It's just their queasy manner and all."

"It all comes down to our being a couple of suspicious bounders, I'm afraid," chuckled he.

"Right!" added I. "So let's get back to the foundry—and don't forget your umbrella again."

"Got it," said Bert. "We ought to be jolly well thankful that we have good jobs and are eating regularly."

But our jobs lasted hardly longer than his words. There was one hell of a row going on in the Blackmans' private office when we returned. We couldn't make out what was being said, but it sure was unfriendly. Loudest and maddest of all was Schultz's customary gentle voice. Boy! Was *he* ticked off!

Presently, out of the office, came ol' Bunny—hopping mad—followed by two of the Blackmans. They were frighteningly pastyfaced and desperately trying to placate him. But he angrily slammed his way out of the studio muttering something like, "Have—the—law on you highbinders!"

Bert and I exchanged knowing glances. The rest of the crew looked bleak.

It sure looked serious for the Blackman boys, all right! And by the same token, no good for us hirelings, either.

Sure enough, next morning, old Papa Blackman came into the work room and announced in what I considered unnecessarily sepulchral tones that the studio was suspending operations as of "right *now*," that we were all to leave immediately, and that we would get what money was owing to us by mail (we never did).

Well, that then appeared to be the end of a very peculiar incident in my animation career. Fortunately, I was unexpectedly rehired by a revived Mutt and Jeff organization, and a few months later I got a phone call from Blankenship, who informed me that he was going back to England and would like to get together with me before he left. Before he hung up he told me that he had some very interesting stuff to tell me about the Blackmans and their daring device. But he didn't enlarge on this last before hanging up.

Working and living in the upper Bronx of New York City was like living in Timbuktu as far as any news of what went on downtown in our sorrowful industry was concerned. And so I looked forward eagerly towards our next and last meeting at Keanes, an old English chop house on Forty-fifth Street.

I couldn't wait to ask him his news, in fact asked it so loudly that the old gent at the next table almost spilled his ale.

"Don't tell me," said Bert with almost intolerable condescension, "that you don't know the Blackman boys and Fagin father are in your local bastille—the Tombs, to be exact."

"Not unexpected," chortled I, "not unexpected at all. What did they get them on, Sherlock? And tell me first what device were you hinting at over the phone? Perpetual motion, maybe? Or an improvement on the Zoetrope?"

"You're closer than you think," said Bert. "Actually, the Zoetrope could be considered as the first projector. But the Blackmans had invented the first *animation machine*!"

"You kidding me?" demanded I.

"Not at all," said he. "Now, you too can have your very own warranted not to rust or corrode, certified not to explode, completely mechanized, and requiring only the minimum of human handling and attention—fake animating device."

"You saw such a machine in that locked room?" I demanded.

"With these very honest blue eyes. And you too can build one.

"*Attendez, mon ami.* First, you very neatly construct a largish wooden box—say, about eight by ten feet. Then at eye-level you make a number of smallish peepholes. These are for viewing certain restricted areas within the box. We don't want to give too much away, do we?

"Next, you garnish the *outside* of this housing with all sorts of electrical and pseudo-mechanical goodies, such as gears, and wheels, with belts and chains. Add colored lights to blink on and off reassuringly. Oh, lots and lots of buttons and switches or whatever else mysterious-looking you can purloin.

"Now, for cosmetic effect, paint everything that shows, inside and outside, with silver and gold paint, and you have, visually, at least, a mind-boggling contraption, rivaling in impact those monstrous newspaper printing presses downtown—at least to any boob getting his first privileged look at it.

"After your prospective victim has resumed fairly normal breathing, and his greedy eyes have been popped back into their sockets, you are ready to demonstrate what Gall hath wrought."

"You're not going to tell me that the contraption really worked!" demanded I.

That brought a snort from Bert. "Bloody well *not*! They wouldn't know how to bring that off, and if they could, they wouldn't have needed the likes of Schultz. They could have gone to any banker, couldn't they? I'd invest in it myself. No, all they wanted to do was create an illusion and get some easy money. The thing couldn't have cost them much of an outlay. They're supposed to have put it all together themselves, out of scrap."

"What a shame their showmanship wasn't put to better use," commented I. "Tell me, did you get to see the *thing* in operation?"

"Of course not," was his quick rejoinder," but I did have time to examine it thoroughly, inside and out, and its purpose was instantly obvious. I peered through the peepholes and was amazed at the clever impressions they revealed. Believe me, I even got a pretty good idea of what the big humbug must have looked like, humming along at full throttle."

"What do you suppose it actually *was* like?" queried I excitedly.

"I found out about that later," said he. "I was able to get in touch with Schultz, a sadly stricken man, poor old barsted, and he filled in all the missing parts of the shabby business. Anyway, here's how it worked."

"A number (very few) models of Foxy G.— they called them platens, or patterns—were inserted thru a slot at one end of the machine. Then, an impressive number of buttons were pressed, and several business-like high-powered-looking switches were thrown, and Schultz was directed to apply his good eye to Peephole No. 1.

"Now, as useless gears ground, and fake belts rolled slowly, Schultz was directed to each succeeding peephole. Meanwhile, other manifestations of creativity were accompanying the process of alleged animation."

I could see Bert was being carried away with dramatic fervor. He wasn't a bad actor. "Imagine!" intoned he dramatically. "Colored light blinking inside and outside that big magic box! You get a brief glimpse of what looks like cartoon cels moving along on a belt. *'Hole No. 2!'* cries one of the Blackmans. Breathless, you switch over and glue your eye on the next peephole! What looks like some sort of stamping operation is dimly taking place—or so you are told by the conductor. All the while, clicks and clatters are accompanying the performance. Peephole after peephole—I think there were at least six—reveal their marvels, briefly, and never really distinctly. Then in the midst of this mesmerizing drama *a gong shatters the clamor and with an almost audible sigh, all noise and activity ceases!* You wait for the climax! It comes! A roll of developed, printed, and fully animated motion picture film plops into a tray at the other end of the wonder machine!"

I am almost ashamed to say that I was breathing hard and actually perspiring a little as Blankenship brought down the figurative curtain on his stirrring act. No wonder old Bunny Schultz had been taken in.

"Kind of gets you, eh, old chap?" chuckled Bert. "Care to buy into the company for, say—twenty thousand or so?"

"Hold on a minute," said I. "There's a few damned loose ends flopping around all over the place, my boy. I could do with a few answers—*if* you don't mind."

"Of course," said he. "I can mention any number, myself. The fact that there was only one brother present at each demonstration is glaringly suspicious. Where was the other one at the time? Inside the box, of course, producing visual and noise effects with the aid of storage batteries."

"Right!" said I. "And also, where did the story and gags come from? Did the machine produce them too? Did they pour a lot of letters and punctuation marks into a hopper? And directives for the story ideas and gags? How come that never occured to Shultz?"

"Don't forget, old boy, that the public hasn't the foggiest notion of what goes into an animated cartoon. You know yourself that there are people who think our cartoons are somehow evolved out of live action. The boys had ignorance working on their side. And Bunny was the champ chump."

"Okay, then—tell me this. Why didn't Schultz demand to be shown the innards of the contraption as he had every right as a financial backer to do? Especially after he had ponied up a big chunk of cash?"

"It's sort of sad to realize that the blackhearted bunch had the poor old guy completely browbeaten and bewildered. They convinced him that it was patent procedure which made it mandatory to disclose nothing of the secret workings to *anybody* until the patents had been granted. He was completely satisfied with stock certificates giving him a fifty-fifty split on their invention!"

"It's hard to feel pity for such dumbness," commented I. "What did he think *we* were doing there, for instance. Not that he ever interested himself in our presence."

"I have to admit the trio were either fantastically lucky in their choice of a pigeon—or a lot cleverer than anyone gives them credit for. Oh, by the way, I was a lot more perspicacious than I knew, about what had happened to our animation. Sure enough. It was piled in one corner of the room, untouched by planners and tracers. So none of our stuff was used in the swindle."

"You say there was an actual bit of finished cartoon on film. *They* couldn't have made it."

"Certainly not. It was produced for them by Garnier, over on Forty-second Street. You know. The industrial cartoon producer. It was terrible stuff. And that's about it." He gestured, "Finis."

"Not by a damn sight" said I. "You've left out one of the most important things!" He looked puzzled.

"Yes," I continued, "now tell me how the hell you managed to get into the secret room? Or into the studio for that matter."

He gave a kind of triumphant chuckle, and looked unabashedly pleased with himself. "It's strange, how the totally unexpected, coming apparently from nowhere, can solve the seemingly unsolvable."

"Bravo!" said I. "You've created an aphorism. Now go on!"

"Well, a few days after the lock-out, I decided I would have a go at clearing up the mystery of the unfriendly door. I contacted the engineer of the building, but he informed me that the studio was sealed by court order. I told him I had left important personal stuff behind which I desperately needed in my next job. He said it was illegal to enter the premises. It looked bad. I started to walk away. It may have been the woebegone expression I put on or the way I hunched my shoulders dejectedly that made him call after me.

" 'Might call the building super—but I don't think it will do you any good!

"Building superintendent, eh? I had never thought of him. In fact I had never seen him, or even knew where he kept himself. But the directory board in the lobby gave me his room number and soon I was before his door, questioning whether it was any use to go in. How glad I was that I did! It took just one look at his Guardsman's moustaches and his hearty 'Hello' to tell me that my case might not be so hopeless, for we instantly recognized each other as brother exiles.

"But it wasn't going to be all that easy. He looked dubious as I told him I needed certain personal articles of my craft which I had left behind. There was an almost imperceptible shaking of his head as though he was so visibly trying to spare my feelings, and let me down easy. He was a very kind and understanding gentleman. He tried to gently switch me away from the subject.

"'Bit of a rain outside,' said he kind of sheepishly. And then he suddenly looked alert, and a twinkle came into his eye. 'Notice you're without your umbrella,' chortled he. 'Left it upstairs then—what?'

"God overlook my lying on Judgment Day. I put on a sheepish grin. 'Exactly,' said I. Whereupon the good fellow took a key off a wall rack.

"Smilingly he said, 'Go to it, old boy—and take your time. Us British have to stick together, what?' And as I turned to go he said, 'Do stop by some time and we'll have a few snorts. And oh, don't forget to lock up and bring me back the key.'

"And now there's only one last point to clear up." My puzzled look made him continue. "How and when did our Mister Schultz find out he was being hookwinked?

"Something like this," he went on without hesitating for my reaction. "Evidently our trusting angel had begun to smell a rodent. It had all been piled up, too high, even for his meager comprehension. On the same day you and I came back from lunch to have the roof fall in on us at the studio (mind you, he told me all this later) Schultz had decided to do a little investigating. It seems some friends, also minimum investors in the project, were getting restless. So he decided to sneak into the mystery room when no one was in the studio and see if he couldn't get a look into the forbidden insides of the machine.

"The boys had never entrusted him with a front door key, nor to one for the barred room either. He got the front door key from the janitor easily, since there was then no legal restriction, and anyway the janitor was familiar with him. So he got into the studio when he knew everyone would be out to lunch."

"Yes," said I dubiously. "But he still had to get into the sacred room that was always locked?"

"Ahh! But it wasn't. You know, my dear Watson, in most every crime there is a fatal flaw. Some idiot among the tricky trio had forgotten to lock the room. When poor Schultz saw how he had been rooked he says he almost had a heart attack. He didn't, as we know, and when the bloody barsteds got back from lunch the timid Bunny had become a raging LION!

"The mystery room itself posed no problem, once I had let myself into the studio. Lawyers and other officials had been investigating daily, and so the sign was off the forbidden door and the door itself was unlocked. Inside the room it took only a quick look within the ridiculous contraption to understand the whole devilish business."

The reader is quite right to question the absolute validity of this short tale. But let me quickly assure him (or her) that there really was once such a bilking and bilkee, and also such a machine as described. And also three such villains, but of different names. And yes, there was a corking English gent, also by a different name. Alas! There was also, once such a safe, prosperous, civilized, utterly delightful and enchanting city such as New York, and also a long, long time ago there was its quiet, quaint old neighbor across the East River, where a certain youngster thrilled to the wonders of the Sunday comics. Yes, that was all true.

Dick Huemer worked in animation studios for more than fifty years, starting with Mutt and Jeff in 1916. He later was story director for such Disney features as Fantasia *and* Dumbo.

The illustrations for this column are Huemer's versions of Foxy Grandpa and the signature of his creator, "Bunny."

'The Black Cauldron'

By MIKE BARRIER

I. The Film-to-be

The next animated featue from the Disney studio, in 1980, will be *The Fox and the Hound*; it will be, from all appearances, another in the line of animal comedies that began with *Jungle Book* and has continued through *The Aristocats*, *Robin Hood*, and *The Rescuers*.

The feature that comes after that, in 1984 or thereabouts, may be quite different, as can be seen from the preliminary sketches by Mel Shaw that are reproduced in this issue. It is quite a leap from the light slapstick and candied thrills of a picture like *The Rescuers* to a story about a huge cauldron that transforms the bodies of the slain into deathless warriors—zombies, if you please.

The film's title, *The Black Cauldron*, comes from a 1965 book by Lloyd Alexander. The book is the second in a series of five books about the land of Prydain—a land whose fictional history is rooted in Welsh legends and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. (The books are discussed elsewhere in this issue.)

Alexander's books embrace many characters and their action covers at least five or six years. Shaw, in adapting the stories for animation, concentrated on *The Black Cauldron*, and on a handful of the major characters: Taran, the Assistant Pig-Keeper, who matures over the course of the books; the Princess Eilonwy, a budding enchantress (using the term literally); Gurgi, a furry what-is-it, half-man and half-beast; and Hen Wen, the oracular pig. In Shaw's version of the story, Hen Wen is sought by the villain, the Horned King, who hopes that she will help him to find the Black Cauldron. With the Cauldron, he can command an invincible army of deathless warriors.

The Horned King is actually the heavy in *The Book of Three*, the first book in the Prydain series, and he dies at the end of that volume. The Cauldron is destroyed at the end of the second volume, in which it is sought by Arawn, the Death-Lord, the ruler of a desolate land called Annuvin (Alexander's analogues for Tolkien's Sauron and Mordor). It is Arawn who dominates the remaining books in the series, until he, too, dies, at the end of *The High King*, the fifth and final volume.

Shaw eliminated Arawn from his version, along with most of the adult characters who play major roles in the books. Dallben, the elderly wizard who is Taran's guardian, remains in the story, but Shaw says that we will not see much of him. Likewise, the story has been compressed so that it will fit more comfortably into an hour and a half of screen time.

The Black Cauldron has now passed from Shaw's hands into those of other artists; he has determined the general shape of the story, and now they will fill in the details.

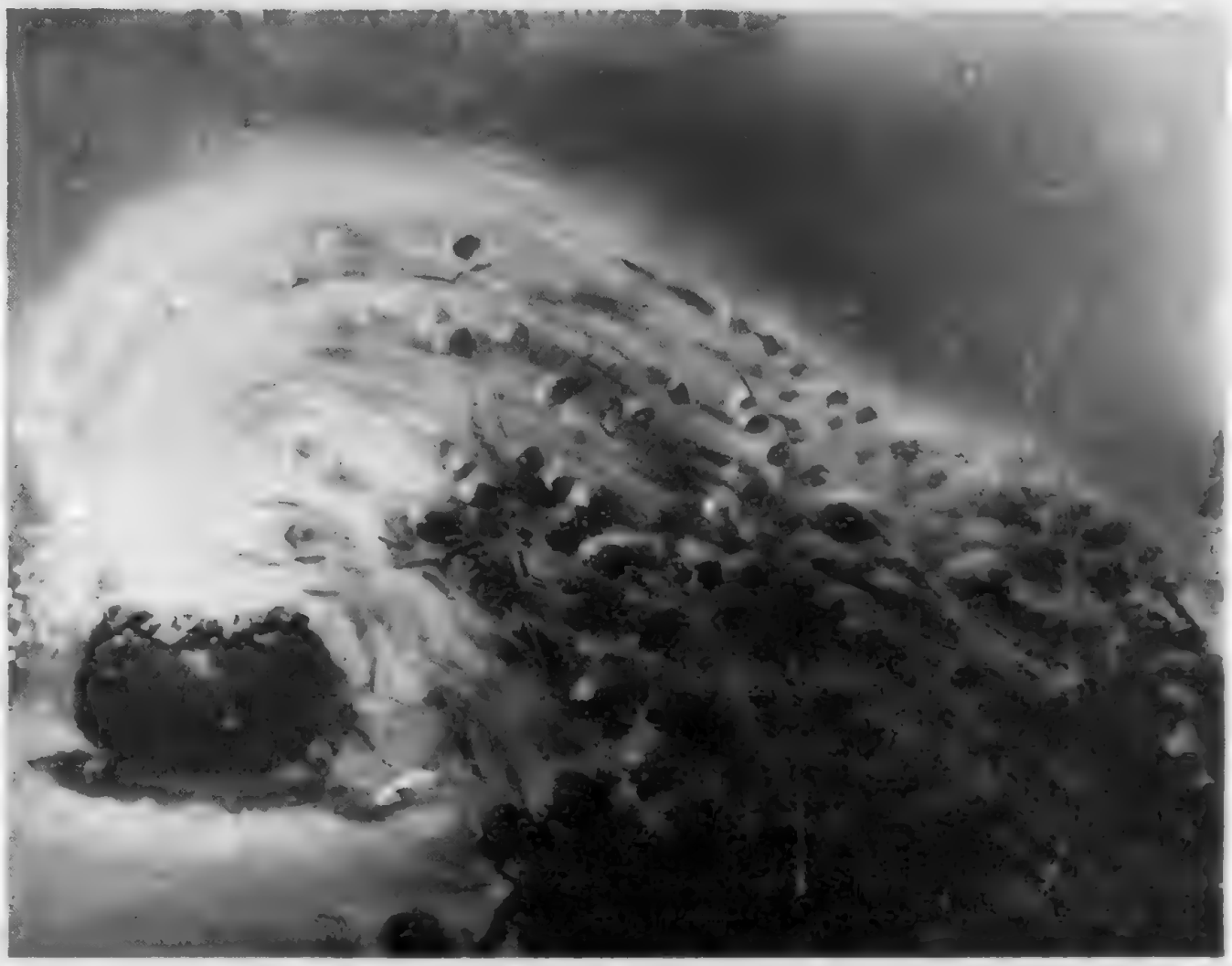
It is far too early to predict what *The Black Cauldron* will be like on the screen. The Disney animated features pass through many stages before they are completed, and it is still very early in the process of transforming *The Black Cauldron* from a book into a film. It is safe to say, though, that *The Black Cauldron*, as Shaw has outlined it, holds in it the seeds of several different films, ranging from a light comedy-adventure to a rich fantasy in the same vein as the earliest Disney features. The next few years will tell us which of those seeds sprouts and bears fruit.

II. The Books

The Book of Three, the first of Lloyd Alexander's five volumes about the mythical land of Prydain, was published in 1964, one year before J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* was issued in paperback. By the time *The High King*, the fifth book in the series, was published in 1968, enthusiasm for Tolkien's work had become a national phenomenon.

Alexander's books surely benefited from this new interest in heroic fantasy, because they are out of the same mold as Tolkien's. The resemblance to Tolkien is strong, and there are many characters in the Prydain books who are close kin to Tolkien characters. But with a difference. Everything in Alexander's books is on a smaller scale—almost like Tolkien in miniature—and the action is far more compressed. There is none of the luxuriant sprawl of Tolkien's language, and no sense of place; Prydain never lives in the reader's imagination as Middle Earth does. My lingering impression of the books is that they are like tidy little machines, with characters and objects planted everywhere so that they can pop up when most useful to the plot.

This at least makes for brisk, efficient, story-telling, and if



Preliminary sketches of The Black Cauldron *by Mel Shaw.*

All illustrations from The Black Cauldron *and* The Fox and the Hound *are* © *1978 Walt Disney Productions.*

A scene from The Fox and the Hound, *the next Disney animated feature, scheduled for release in 1980.*

this were the worst I could say for the books, I would only be saying that I find it impossible to take them seriously. Unfortunately, Alexander does much more than make the mechanics of his stories obtrusive; he tries to mix oil and water. The Prydain stories are, on the one hand, a heroic fantasy; on the other, they are a story of a young boy's growing into maturity. Since the conflicts in heroic fantasies are always painted in black and white, and since growing up means, in large part, learning that life is painted in shades of gray, there is no way that the two kinds of story can be mated. We are left with books whose claim on our attention is the swordplay and adventure they contain, but whose message purports to be that all of this exciting activity counts for less than slopping pigs and raising turnips. This used to be known as having your cake and eating it, too.

Alexander tries to knot his contradictions together at the end of the fifth book, *The High King*, in some of the ugliest pages in any highly regarded children's book (*The High King* won the Newberry Medal). Arawn, the Death-Lord, has been overthrown; the craftsmen's secrets he had stolen have been recovered; and a reasonably bright and prosperous future awaits Prydain, thanks mostly to Taran, the Assistant Pig-Keeper. Now, Taran and the friends who helped him to win this great victory are told that they are to sail from Prydain with the Sons of Don, Prydain's rulers (Alexander's clones of Tolkien's Numenoreans), to a land of unending summer and never-ending life.

Taran, given this opportunity to enjoy eternal happiness with those he loves best, turns his back on it, mumbling something about an obligation to friends who were killed in the war agains Arawn. Loyalty to the dead outweighs love for the living.

This is a monstrous choice that Taran makes, but Alexander obviously intends that we should applaud it, as do Taran's mentors, Dallben and Prince Guydion, who promptly inform him that he has passed the test, and is now High King of Prydain. The girl Eilonwy—a tiresome little shrew who has chewed on Taran through many pages of the five books—gives up her own claim on eternal happiness so that she can be yoked with Taran in what one suspects will be a particularly unpleasant marriage.

For those of us who do not live in Prydain, the issue is not whether to choose eternal happiness or a short life of pain and toil, but how to make the most of the short life of pain and toil we are stuck with. Eternal happiness with those we love is simply not available to us, at least not in this life. If it were, would we turn our backs on it? Why should we? Alexander has no persuasive answers to such questions, and so he leaves his hero—supposedly now matured—sunk in what looks for all the world like smugness and masochism.

There could be no honest-to-goodness "happily ever after" in a book that is supposed to be about growing up, as well as about a fairy-tale conflict between good and evil. Alexander—as usual trying to have it both ways—dangles a "happily ever after" in front of his characters and his readers, and then snatches it away. His story and his message are both soured as a result.

There is some consolation in knowing that Alexander's peculiar moralizing is not likely to survive in the film version of *The Black Cauldron*. He prepared several "treatments" (preliminary scripts, or outlines) for the Disney studio, but none were accepted.

Lilly, Walt, Ruth, Roy and Edna Disney in front of the Kingswell studio around 1925.

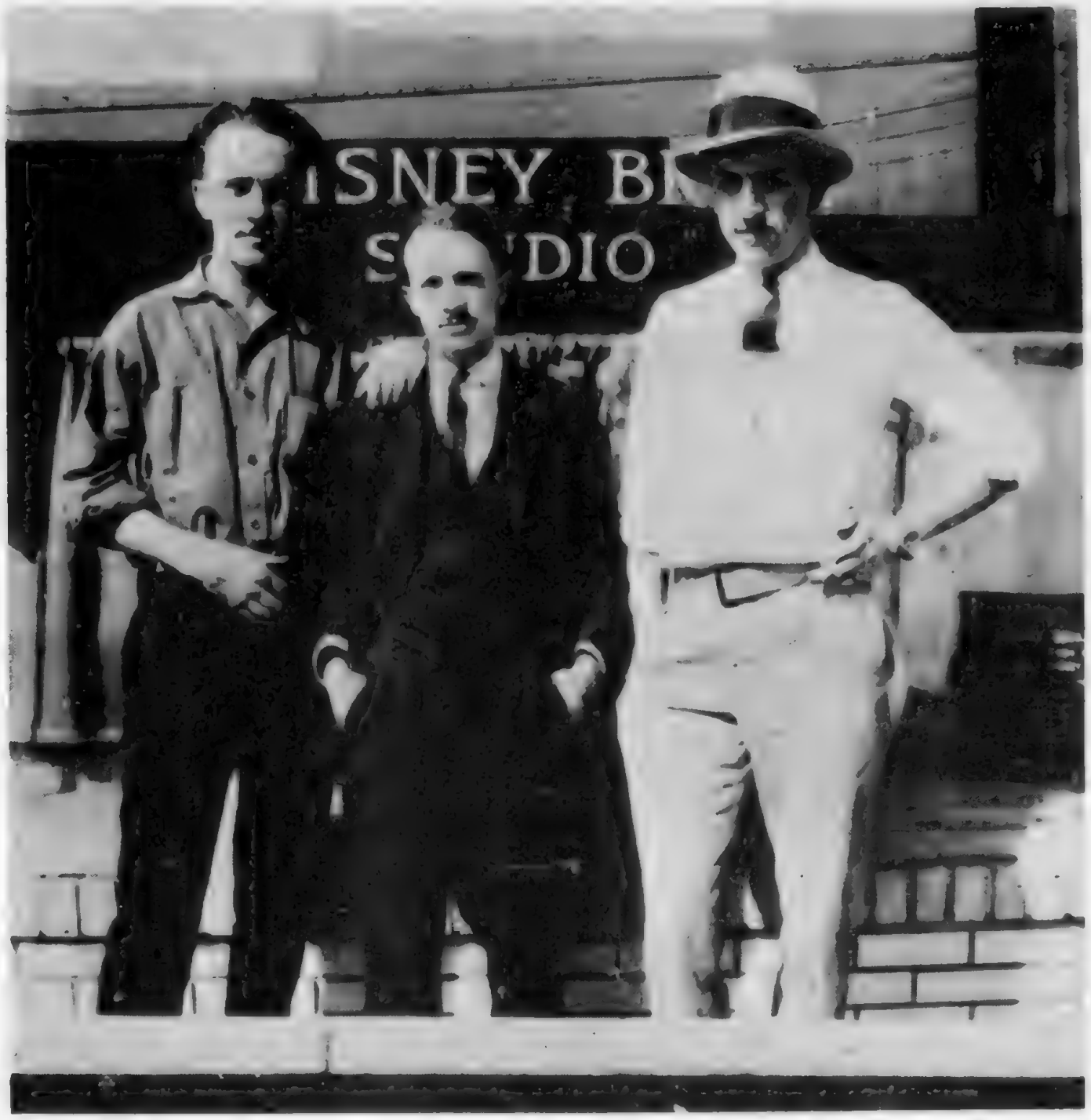
Disney Before Burbank

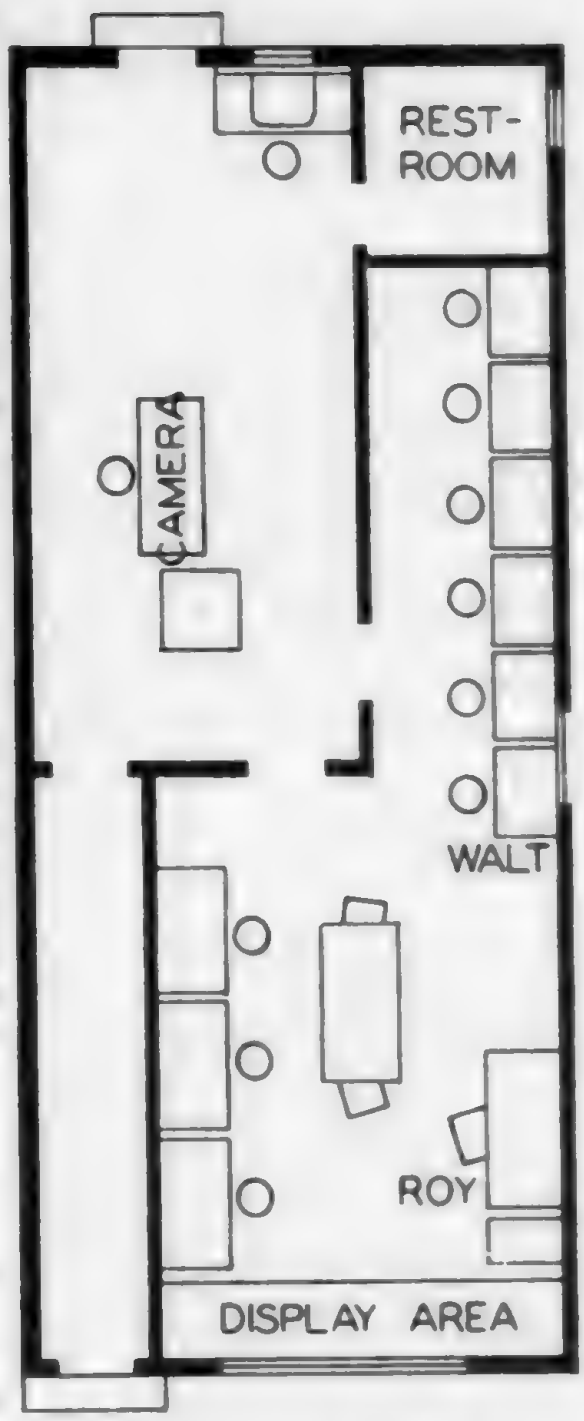
The Kingswell and Hyperion Studios

By DAVID R. SMITH

When people think of the Walt Disney Studio, they usually think of the modern, spacious, well-designed plant nestled in Burbank in the San Fernando Valley just ouside of Los Angeles. But the Disney Studio has not always been in Burbank. It had its humble beginnings in Hollywood and made two moves before finally arriving in Burbank. Since detailed descriptions of the earlier studios have never been published I am going to try in this article to present the facts, as they are known, of the first three Disney Studios.

Walt Disney had begun his career in Kansas City, Missouri in the early 1920's. After a few minor jobs with commercial art firms, he managed to raise enough capital to start a small animated cartoon studio. Laugh-O-gram Films, Inc. lasted only one year and when it had to close, Disney realized that he had no future in Kansas City. So, as did many young men in the 1920's, Walt Disney left Kansas City for California. This was late July, 1923. On his arrival, he moved in with his uncle, Robert S. Disney, at 4406 Kingswell Avenue in Hollywood. While looking for a job, Walt Disney had stationery printed.





Left, Ub Iwerks, Ham Hamilton, and Walt Disney outside the Kingswell Studio. Right, the layout of the Kingswell studio, ca. 1925.

This was a long-time trait of his. He may have had money for little else, but he always found the funds to have a business card and letterhead printed. The letterhead announced: "Walt. Disney, Cartoonist" and gave the Kingswell address. In Uncle Robert's garage, Disney busied himself building an animation stand for a Pathe camera which he had just purchased for $200.

Early in October 1923 came good news from New York. Margaret J. Winkler, a film distributor, had agreed to contract for a series of "Alice Comedies," for which Disney had made a "pilot film" in Kansas City. With his brother, Roy, Disney rented on October 8, 1923, some space in the rear of a small office occupied by Holly-Vermont Realty at 4651 Kingswell Avenue. The rent was $10.00 a month. The Studio was especially convenient as it was just two blocks down the street from Uncle Robert's house. On October 16, the Disneys signed their first contract, and they were in business. In January 1924, the Disneys rented a vacant lot at 4589 Hollywood Blvd., at Rodney Drive about three blocks from the studio. The lot, which also cost $10.00 a month, provided the location for outdoor shooting on the Alice films, which featured a live girl, Alice, who acted in a world of cartoon animals.

The first Disney Studio was soon outgrown. By February, the Disneys had enlarged their staff to seven, and they were coveting the space occupied by the real estate agents. With the promise of regular income from the Alice Comedies, Disney negotiated a lease on the adjoining store, at 4649 Kingswell Avenue, for $35.00 a month. A separate garage was also rented for $7.00. The sign on the window read "Disney Bros. Studio" and in a row along the bottom were drawings from the Alice series.

The contract for the first year called for one Alice Comedy a month; with the second contract, it went to one every three weeks. Rollin "Ham" Hamilton had signed in February to help Disney with the animation, and in July, top animator Ub Iwerks, a friend from Kansas City, arrived. This freed Disney from further animation duties and he was able thereafter to devote his time to story work and direction, the fields in which

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David R. Smith is the archivist for Walt Disney Productions. His article on Walt Disney's work in animation in Kansas City appeared in Funnyworld *No. 19.*

All illustrations are courtesy of the Disney Archives and are © Walt Disney Productions.

he especially excelled. By June 1925, when artists Hugh and Walker Harman arrived with Rudolf Ising from Kansas City, there were twelve people struggling in the tiny storefront studio on Kingswell.

As one entered the studio, one would proceed down a short entrance way to a gate. Over the three-foot high gate one could see the camera room. The camera stand and camera were in the center of the room. The cameraman, Mike Marcus, occasionally was spelled by Roy Disney. Ub Iwerks had converted the hand-crank camera to motor drive, utilizing a telegraph key for its operation. Film was stored in one corner of the room, and, at a sink in another corner, Roy Disney washed off cels for re-use until eventually a cel-washer/janitor, John Lott, was hired. A door at the rear of the room led to a lavatory which doubled as a darkroom.

In a room at the front of the building, Roy Disney had his desk. He kept the books and accounts of the company, and at a large table in the center of the room, punched the holes in the cels and animation paper. That table served many purposes. It was also there that Ub Iwerks had his special drawing board where he did all the posters, backgrounds, and lettering of titles and sub-titles. A lower level of the table held the supply of clean cels. Facing the table were the desks for the inkers and painters.

In a row extending along the east wall of the building were the desks and boards for the animators. Walt Disney occupied the desk nearest the front so that he could more easily communicate with Roy, the inkers, and the cameraman. All of the furniture was inexpensive and utilitarian.

Money was coming in regularly for the Alice Comedies by the summer of 1925, and Walt and Roy Disney decided that the time had arrived for them to expand their operation by building their own studio.

After a search for a suitable location, the Disneys paid, on July 6, 1925, a $400 deposit on a vacant lot on Hyperion Avenue near Griffith Park Blvd., a little over a mile from the Kingswell location. Construction on a new studio began

The Silly Symphony unit at the Hyperion studio, 1929. From left, Johnny Cannon, Jack Cutting, Wilfred Jackson, Ub Iwerks, and Les Clark.

shortly thereafter.

The move to the new studio at 2719 Hyperion Avenue, was completed in the spring of 1926. Over the next five years, numerous alterations were made to that first building, some of them minor and some of them major. Offices and partitions were changed, desks were moved, and additions were made onto the front, side, and rear of the building. During this period the staff grew steadily until by April 1930 it had passed thirty. Each Disney employee from that period who has been queried about the building remembers it differently, partially because each one was hired at a different time and due to all the remodelling, found a different interior layout. The accompanying illustration combines the recollection of a number of people as to the way the building was laid out around May 1928. This was before any additions had been made to the building.

At this time, the building was divided roughly into two parts. On one side was Walt Disney's office, tables and boards for the animators, a small darkroom and camera room, and a long table for painting backgrounds. Originally no one worked full-time at that table. The job of background painter fell to whomever could be spared from animation or inbetweening when a picture was about ready to go to camera. Wilfred Jackson, who had just joined the staff, recalls, "Since I was the least useful member of the animation crew, I painted backgrounds for most of the early 'Mickeys.' "

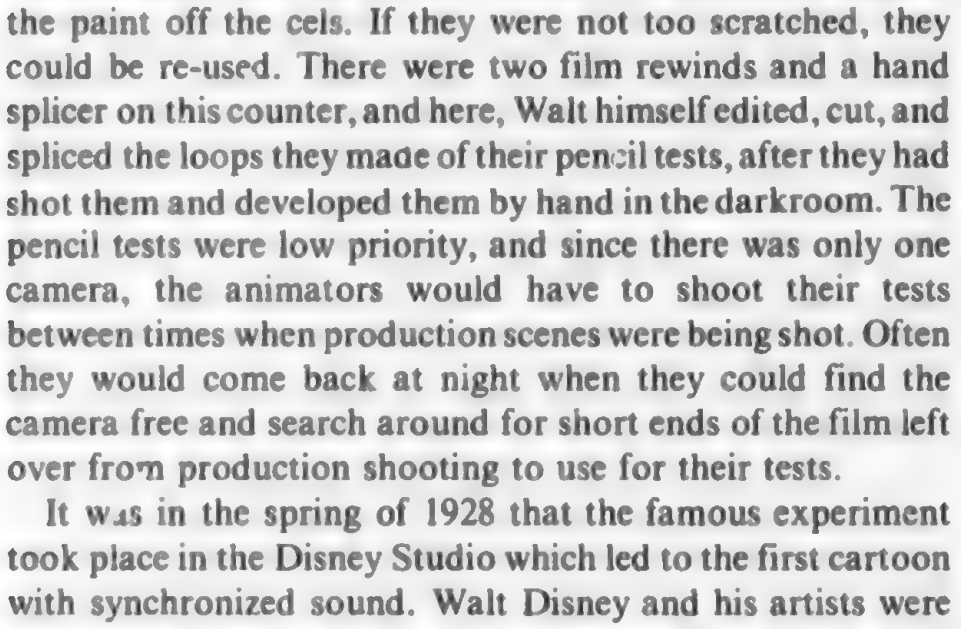
At the animation desk closest to his office, Walt Disney would time the animation and make out the exposure sheets for the cameraman to use in shooting the scenes. This step came after the animation was completed but before the drawings were sent ot ink and paint. Disney would go through all the drawings of each scene carefully, placing them on the pegs of his animation board and flipping them to see if the action and the timing, as suggested by the animator, met with his approval. Sometimes he would call the animator over to his desk to review changes he wanted them to make in the action. Very rarely he would send a short scene to camera to have a pencil test made, but only in the case of some unusually important or experimental action. Within a very short time, Disney's responsibilities grew along with his confidence in his

The Mickey Mouse unit at the Hyperion studio, 1929. From left, Dick Lundy, Norm Ferguson, Jack King, Bert Gillett, Merle Gilson, and Ben Sharpsteen.

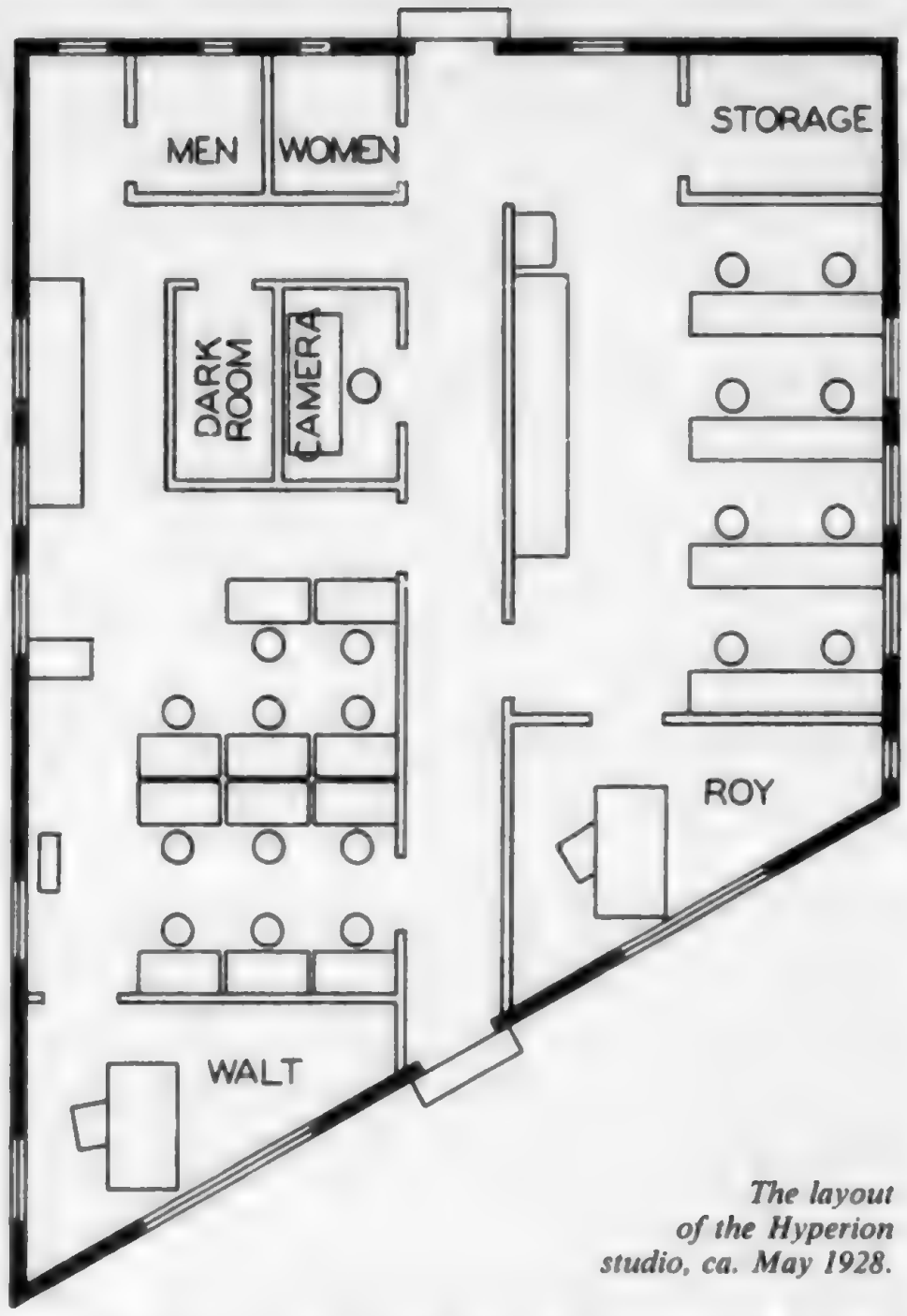
animators, so he gave up timing the scenes. The animators would fill in their own exposure sheets and have a pencil test shot of each entire scene for him to view. If he had changes to suggest, the scene would go back to the animator for revision and then a new pencil test would be shot. Disney thus retained his control over the action and timing of his pictures, but with a great saving of his own time. For viewing the films, Ub Iwerks had again demonstrated his technical prowess by converting an old, silent projector into a type of moviola whereby the film could be viewed directly rather than being projected on a screen.

The other side of the building held Roy's office and an area for inking and painting. Along one wall was a long work counter and a sink. At the sink, John Lott, the janitor, washed the paint off the cels. If they were not too scratched, they could be re-used. There were two film rewinds and a hand splicer on this counter, and here, Walt himself edited, cut, and spliced the loops they made of their pencil tests, after they had shot them and developed them by hand in the darkroom. The pencil tests were low priority, and since there was only one camera, the animators would have to shoot their tests between times when production scenes were being shot. Often they would come back at night when they could find the camera free and search around for short ends of the film left over from production shooting to use for their tests.

It was in the spring of 1928 that the famous experiment took place in the Disney Studio which led to the first cartoon with synchronized sound. Walt Disney and his artists were not sure that an animated cartoon with sound could convincingly give the illusion that drawings could make noises. So, they rigged up a bed sheet in front's office door. The door had a glass window in it and Walt and several of the artists crowded into the office where they could see the animation on the sheet through the glass door. Ub Iwerks had improvised a microphone out of a telephone and placed a speaker behind the sheet. Roy Disney was stationed outside the back window of the Studio with the projector, so that the projector noise would not disturb the audience. The audience consisted of the artists' wives. While the wives did not appear especially impressed, each of the artists would take a turn to run out into the makeshift theater to listen to the sounds



The exterior of the Hyperion studio around 1930.



The layout of the Hyperion studio, ca. May 1928.

which appeared to be coming from the animated characters on the screen. Their judgment was that sound added tremendously to the cartoon's effectiveness, especially when it was exactly synchronized with the action.

The success of Mickey Mouse after the release of *Steamboat Willie* on November 18, 1928, at New York's Colony Theater, brought much needed cash and confidence into the Disney fold. A second series of films, the Silly Symphonies, was added and the staff was increased, necessitating enlargements of the building. Additions to the rear and side in the summer of 1929 provided new offices and a music room where story meetings and gag sessions were held. The name "music room" came from the fact that the composer had his piano there, and would compose his scores for the cartoons in conjunction with the work of the director and animators. The accompanying sketch, prepared by comic strip artist Floyd Gottfredson, shows the layout of the Disney Studio around the beginning of 1930.

In 1930, more additions were made. The front wall of the building was moved forward about six feet to the sidewalk. A second camera was purchased in November 1929 and a third in August, 1930.

A major addition to the Studio was made in the Spring of 1931. A two-story animators' building and a sound stage were added to the rear of the lot, completely changing the

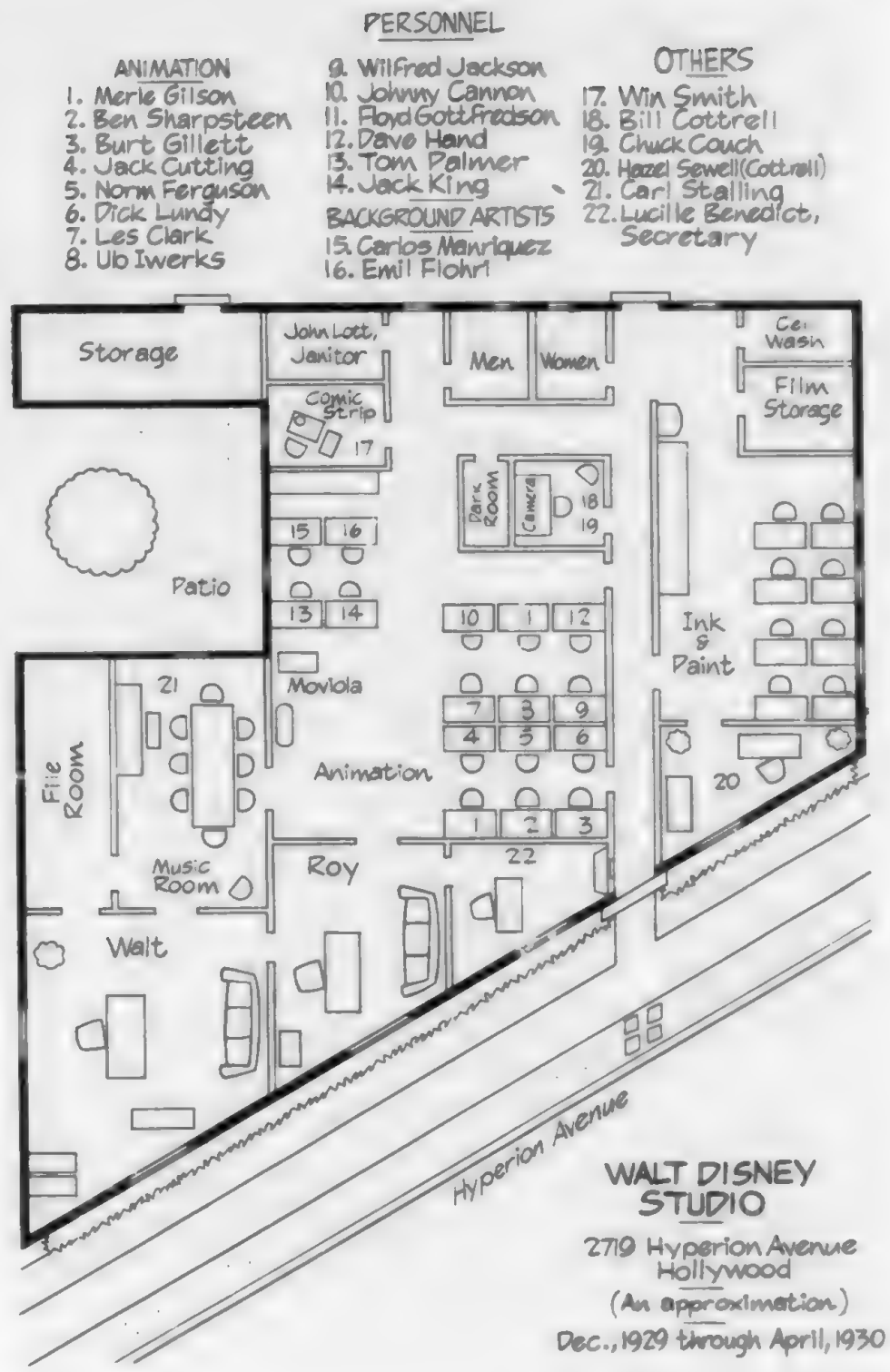
appearance of the Studio. The Disney Film Recording Company, which had been renting space at the Tec-Art Studios on Melrose Avenue across from the Paramount lot, moved onto the Disney lot, utilizing the new sound stage. In just a few short years the Studio had grown from 1,600 square feet of floor space to 20,000 square feet.

The new animators' building was L-shaped, with large music rooms projecting from the center of the L on both floors. Animators, and layout and background artists occupied rooms on both floors. There was a receptionist on the ground floor, and Walt Disney and his secretary had offices on the north side of the second floor. On the roof was erected a large, neon sign, topped by a smiling Mickey Mouse and reading "Walt Disney Studios/ Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphony sound cartoons."

The Studio annexed an organ factory next door to the original building, providing administrative offices for Roy Disney, a dining and conference room, and an accounting department.

1934 saw the beginnings of a new project at the Disney Studio: an animated film of feature length. As artists were brought in to work on *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Walt and Roy Disney realized that to continue the short cartoons while at the same time working on a feature film, the space for animators would have to be expanded. So another two-story animators' building, providing 11,200 square feet of additional space, was constructed, attached to the north wing of the first animators' building. Small rooms each held an animator and his assistant. Large rooms were provided for inbetweeners and background artists, and there were rooms for training new artists. The second floor housed the Studio's first two real projection rooms, sharing a common booth. Previous to this, artists had crowded around a moviola in a small unventilated closet, which earned the descriptive term "sweat box." There was also a small library to house the growing collection of reference books and periodicals.

Other buildings were added during the production of *Snow White*. An ink and paint building was constructed in the



This floor plan for the Hyperion studio was drawn by Floyd Gottfredson, who was for many years the artist for the Mickey Mouse newspaper strip.

The Hyperion studio in the spring of 1931, during construction.

Recording on the sound stage at the Hyperion studio. Bill Garity is at the control panel at the left, Walt Disney is slouched in the chair at right, and Frank Churchill is conducting; director Wilfred Jackson is the man wearing suspenders.

spring of 1935. Due to space problems, an apprentice animators' building, built in the fall, had to be located on a lot across Hyperion Avenue from the Studio proper. Two apartment houses next door to the Studio were purchased in 1936 to be used as offices, and a large "feature building," matching the 1934 animators' building, was added in 1937. Various small bungalows, film vaults, shops, and labs filled all available space by mid-1938.

The success of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* had proved to Walt Disney that there was a world market for full-length animated features, so he determined to schedule the release of one a year. By the time production started on *Bambi*, additional space had to be rented at 861 Seward Street

The Hyperion studio in the mid 1930's. The "music rooms" are in the bays in the center; Walt Disney's office is behind the balcony at the right.

in Hollywood for the unit working on that film, and in March 1939, the second floor of a building at 1717 N. Vine Street was rented for the Story Research, Promotion, Engineering, Comic Strip, and Training Departments.

With several features in the works, plus the usual run of shorts, it was soon decided that the Hyperion Studio would no longer be sufficent. There had been talk of tunneling under the street, but the Disneys decided to find a new location instead. The Hyperion Studio had grown in a haphazard way, and there was really no particular aim. What was required was a new Studio, bult to accommodate their new needs. So, with help from the profits of *Snow White*, which were beginning to come in, a deposit was made on fifty-one acres in Burbank on August 31, 1938.

The general move to Burbank took place between December 26, 1939 and January 5, 1940. Some departments had moved to Burbank earlier—camera work on *Pinocchio* started in the new camera department in August 1939, and the *Bambi* unit moved into the still incomplete animation building when the Seward Street lease ran out in the fall. Other departments, such as ink and paint, did not move until the spring of 1940.

The Disney Studio in Burbank was designed by Disney to be used as an animation studio. It has continued to serve that function for almost four decades. Changes were made as the company grew and expanded into new fields, but the Studio has proved adaptable. Visitors to the still modern and utilitarian plant, with its lawns, trees, and flowers giving it the appearance of a college campus rather than a movie studio, seldom realize that it grew to its present stature from very humble beginnings behind a real estate office on Kingswell Avenue.

This photo of the Mintz studio's staff was taken in the mid-'30's; Charles Mintz is the bespectacled man kneeling at the center of the photo. I. Klein is standing, seventh from the left. (Courtesy of I. Ellis)

"Screen Gems" Made of Paste

Memories of the Charles Mintz Studio

By I. KLEIN

In the heyday of animated cartoons, before the aggressive intrusion of TV, there were seven major animated cartoon studios. Two were on the East coast in the New York City area, the other five in Hollywood. To list them alphabetically: Disney; Fleischer (later Famous); Lantz; MGM; Mintz-Screen Gems; Terrytoons; Warner Brothers.

The Disney product is ever present on the electronic box in America's homes. The Disney features going back to *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* are revived in our nation's theaters at regular intervals. Fleischer's and Famous' Popeye the Sailor and Casper the Friendly Ghost are still in circulation, as is Walter Lantz's Woody Woodpecker. MGM's Tom and Jerry is still on TV. Terrytoons' Mighty Mouse and Warner Brothers' Bugs Bunny are alive and making money for their producers or whoever has bought the ownership of those films and titles. This accounts for six of the studios listed in the first paragraph. The seventh, Charles Mintz's Screen Gems, is missing. No Mintz-Screen Gems

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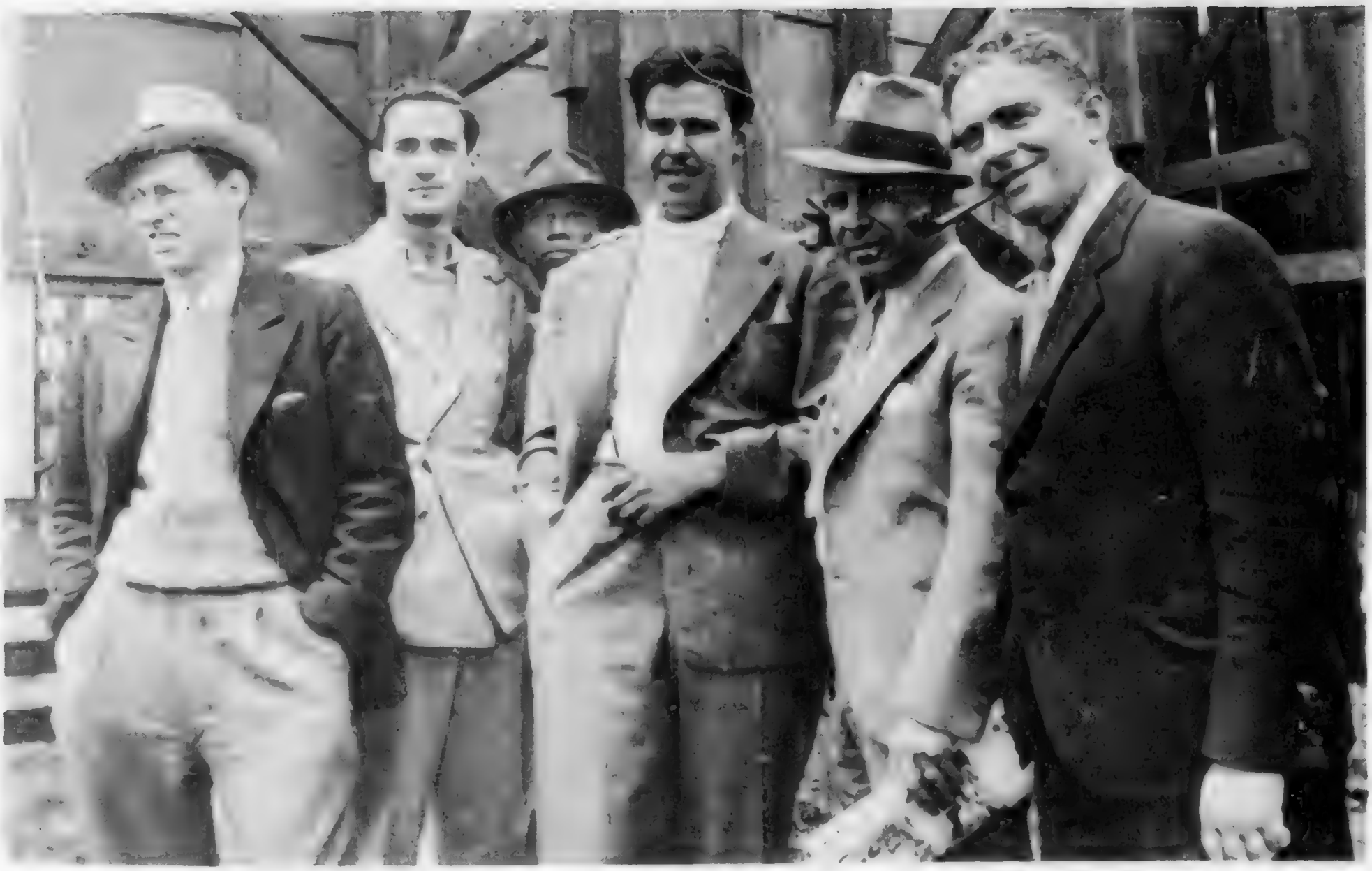
I. Klein's long career included work as an animator and story man at such studios as Disney, Famous, Terry, and Van Beuren. His article about his earliest days in the animation business appeared in Funnyworld *No. 14.*



I. Klein is at the far right in this photo. The other Mintz staff members are, from left, Clark Watson, Jules Engel, Felix Alegre, Rudy Zamora, and Phil Davis. (Courtesy of Ben Shenkman)

cartoons have been shown in recent years. Why?

The Charles Mintz-Screen Gems studio produced Scrappy, Krazy Kat and "Color Rhapsodies" cartoons. Seventy-five to eighty people were on the staff. A pretty good-sized staff. Enough people to do the job. But something was missing. What?

The Scrappy character was stiffly designed and completely lacked the real-boy qualities of, for example, a Skippy or a Dennis the Menace.

As for Krazy Kat, the Screen Gems version of that famous cartoon character was in name only. It had none of the whimsy of the true Krazy Kat created by George Herriman. It was just a cartoon cat walking upright. In that respect it fell far short of Felix the Cat.

Krazy Kat like Popeye was taken from newspaper comic strips, unlike all the other animated cartoon characters listed above, which were all created for the motion picture screen. Unlike Krazy, Popeye followed the design and spirit of Segar's creation. Mintz's staff missed the boat with Krazy. As a matter of fact, back in 1925, in New York City, Ben Harrison and Manny Gould ran a small animation studio where they did a number of Krazy Kat cartoons for Charles Mintz. This was before sound came to the movies and before the Screen Gems studio in Hollywood. On their staff were two of Screen Gems' future directors, Sid Marcus and Art Davis. The pattern for Krazy Kat as Krazy was to be done at Screen Gems was already set in New York; there was no Ignatz Mouse or any of George Herriman's whimsy and humor.

During the period when I was on the Screen Gems animation staff in Hollywood, I asked Mr. Mintz why we were not following the comic strip in our Krazy Kat cartoons. Why we never used Ignatz with his attacks on Krazy, the brick throwing, the whimsical confiict between those two? Or Offissa Pup and the other funny creatures of Herriman's newspaper strip? Mintz's answer was that if we were to follow the strip we would confuse the movie public. That public was accepting Krazy Kat just as Mintz was presenting him, so there was no need for an Ignatz to be tormenting Krazy with a barrage of bricks. So my qustion was dismissed. However, by coincidence one of the high-brow magazines published an article by Gilbert Seldes, a week or so after my talk with Mintz, about Herriman's "Krazy Kat" comic strip. In the course of this article Seldes wondered why *Krazy Kat* had never been made as an animated cartoon. (Remember, this was in the 1930's.) I showed this article to Charles Mintz. He laughed and said: "Okay, we will give it a try. We'll do a cartoon including Ignatz Mouse and the rest of Herriman's comic strip characters." The assignment was given to Ben Harrison, one of the four Screen Gems directors. The other three were Manny Gould, Sid Marcus, and Art Davis.

When Harrison told me he was going to do that film, he added with a chuckle: "This is a chance for a cheater. It will give me a chance to catch up with my schedule." I did not quite know what he meant by a cheater (in this particular

case) until I saw the finished film when it was screened at the studio. The picture turned out to be a string of shots of Ignatz throwing bricks at Krazy Kat without reason or provocation. There was no probe or analysis of George Herriman's "Krazy" community, to see what made it tick . . . of Krazy taking the brick wallops as love taps. If only a story meeting had been held with all the directors and animators bouncing the material around, the Mintz studio might have done for Krazy Kat what Max Fleischer did with Popeye. As it turned out, instead of taking the suggestion to work close to Herriman's strip as a challenge, it was reduced to a cheater.

The four key men of the studio were capable workers. Marcus and Art Davis are still at their animation boards. Manny Gould died recently while active on the job. Harrison is in retirement in New York. He returned East many years ago and for many years produced TV commercials. He was one of the pioneers of TV commercials.

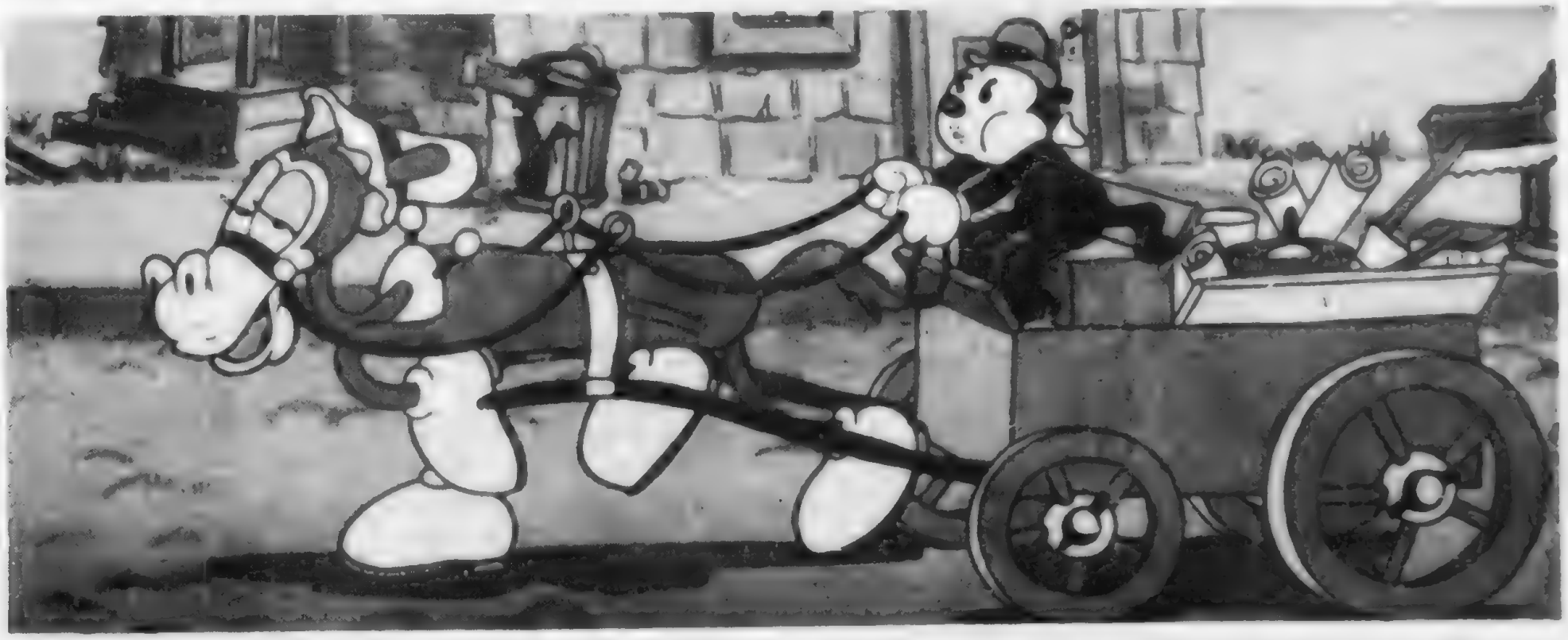
The boss of the studio, Charles Mintz, was a businessman, and an easy man to talk to. On the whole, he did not take part in production.

Mintz was a "joiner." He had a variety of police badges, all gold and honorary and very important looking. One day shortly after I became a staff member there was an announcement that on the following Sunday the entire staff of Screen Gems was invited as guests of the Los Angeles police chief at a luncheon party at the police rifle range. I think it had to do with Mintz getting another honorary gold police badge. It was altogether a weird "bash." It started off with the police crack shots showing off their deadly marksmanship. The luncheon consisted of soup and London pot roast with boiled potatoes and apple pie. But what made it unique were the waiters. They were all convicts still doing time. They winked and leered at the girls. Our men were splashed with soup as those guys plopped the bowls down on the tables. They were polite, though, constantly saying, "Excuse me, *sir*!" Then another splash on someone's best necktie. I was one of the lucky ones. I came off with only a soup spot on my trousers.

There was one time when Charles Mintz stepped in with an attempt to influence production. It did not concern quality, only a matter of economy. He called into the screening room the four directors and the animators. We were treated to a screening of a Fleischer cartoon. It was about a male and female swan . . . boy meets girl; boy loses girl; boy and girl happily united. Mintz pointed out that this was a good cartoon with *only two characters. Very economical*! Mintz asked each of the four directors to submit a story idea with only two or three characters. He gave them the theme, a popular song of that time, "Glow, Little Glow-worm." He even sang the chorus, "Glow, little glow-worm, glitter, glitter," etc.

Within a week or so, Ben Harrison got the assignment. (I don't know if there really was a competition.) I received a chunk of footage to animate on this opus. Well, Ben completely ignored the restrictions on the number of characters. I don't know if it was to show Mintz that he should keep his nose out of production, but there were glow-worms (lightning bugs) without number in this seven-minute animated cartoon. It was a heavy load from animation down through inbetweening, inking, and painting. I don't think the finished product made animation history.

When I changed over to work for Walt Disney, I discovered that the directors did not write their own stories. There was a story department. Also, stories were not just "written off the cuff." Ideas and gags were bounced around. Storyboards with the story and gags were pinned up in continuity, for discussion, for improvement, for replacement. Entire stories, after much work, were sometimes shelved. Back at Screen Gems, the stories were produced as in the silent days. The director made story continuity sketches just for himself and for handing out the sequences to the animators. At times the first part of the cartoon would be animated before the director knew what the ending would be like. It is not surprising that the Mintz-Screen Gems animated cartoons have had no life beyond the time they were produced.



Krazy Kat in his Screen Gems incarnation; a scene from The Bill Poster *(1933)* (Courtesy of Harry Love)

George Griffin

Making Art, Frame by Frame

By JOHN CANEMAKER

Karen Cooper, who is director of Film Forum, New York's leading showplace for avant-garde, independently made documentaries and animation, strode the length of the long East Village loft she shares with George Griffin, brandishing a newspaper. "Even old animators have to die," she said, pointing out a small obituary notice in the *New York Post* while looking up at the poker-faced Griffin, who was dressed in a red tee-shirt and jeans, tall as a totem and easily towering over the diminutive Cooper.

The obit succinctly reported the death of John Randolph Bray on October 10th; regarding his career, the *Post*, with characteristic inaccuracy, told its readers that Bray produced "the first animated cartoon," a benighted statement that neatly wiped out the contributions of J.S. Blackton, Emile Cohl, Segundo de Chomon, Winsor McCay, Raoul Barre, and others during the first dozen years of this century. The *Post* also reported Bray's age as 81; he was, however, 99 years old when he died, *the* key figure in the early movement of animation away from the independent artists who worked slowly on a limited number of films and toward a

factory/studio system that permitted large-volume production of series films.

Bray's various patents (most notably on the use of celluloid acetate, or "cels") speeded up animation's production processes and firmly lodged the new art in the realm of the newspaper cartoonists, who saw cartoon film series as a marvelous way to popularize their static print creations.

I interviewed J.R. Bray when he was 94, a man so alert and vigorous he insisted on driving me in his car to the Bridgeport bus depot after our talk. It was ironic that I should learn of Bray's death while talking with George Griffin, a leading independent animator/entrepreneur who strongly feels that studio production systems with their dependence on stratified artists and cel technique result only in "artistic alienation: the separation of worker and product."

Griffin laughed quietly when I reminded him of an interview with me four years ago in which he said with mock-anger, "I feel sometimes like putting dirt on cels, or salting them and eating them for lunch!"

"That sounds almost romantic today," smiled Griffin, who last year wrote a decidedly unromantic appraisal of studio animation for a yet-to-be-published anthology of animation articles. "The Golden Age cartoon is dead," wrote Griffin. "As mass entertainment it thrived in a naively optimistic cultural climate when the guys and the gals at the studios were a swell gang; and their innocent art still delights even the most hard-nosed realist. But it is a serious error to resort to the same production apparatus for contemporary animation . . . It is the task of the new animation, whether it addresses a limited art audience or a more general entertainment audience, to stretch and redefine its form through experimentation while realizing the medium's potential for expressing a personal vision."

Griffin, at age 35, has completed over a dozen personal animated films in nine years. His work, which is distributed by Serious Business Company, has garnered numerous awards and attention at international film festivals, including those in New York, Ottawa, Zagreb, Oberhausen, Dallas, among others; he has received production grants from the New York State Council on the Arts, the NEA, and last year was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship. He accepts the occasional commissioned work (mostly segments for public TV), but wary of being "drained by unformed minds," he no longer teaches at NYU and Harvard, preferring to devote his time and energies to his personal films. The prolific Griffin has consistently, stubbornly touted the work of the independent animators: in 1978, he assembled and published a selection of drawings and statements by sixty-eight independent American animators in an elegantly packaged book titled *Frames*.

Griffin, whose animation experience began in the studios, admits he is, in his own films, "craft-oriented. I want a fine product, but one with soul and thoughtfulness." Griffin's films are direct and playful, and display an unabashed fascination with the tools of animation. He explores the act of making art: "It is not a case of elevating the act and process of creation," he says, "but rather lowering yourself to change your viewpoint. I want to show the system and the product, my personal involvement with the materials and the process of creation."

George Griffin was born in Atlanta, the son of an architect who was a newspaper cartoonist. George had always drawn but kept this talent submerged while he pursued the academic life at Dartmouth. He dropped out of college, was drafted and endured two years in the Army (where he learned photography), and upon returning to school was active in the anti-war movement, organizing and doing silk screen posters. After graduating in political science, Griffin moved to New York, worked for the Office of Economic Opportunity and began hanging out with film students at New York University. Seeing the films of Stan Brakhage, Robert Breer and Harry Smith made Griffin "aware of animation as an art form. Then I made a conscious effort to learn all I could about animation."

He went on an extended vacation for one month to Nova Scotia armed with a Bolex, some paper, and paint. "I attempted to make a film by myself there. It was a big flop, but that experience I've used again and again—jumping into something, not knowing how it's been done, maybe coming up with a new technique, maybe the reworking of an old technique, but feeling I've discovered it myself."

During 1969, Griffin worked as an assistant animator at several New York commercial studios and briefly for Ralph Bakshi on *Fritz the Cat*. "I think Bakshi was disappointed in my work," Griffin said once, "I *know* I was disappointed in what he was doing to Robert Crumb's work." Recently, Griffin elaborated on his discontent with studio methods: "I picked up a great deal [of information]. But once I was given some responsibility, I was criticized very heavily. My drawings were unceremoniously thrown out as junk. It was a very harsh experience . . . consistency is the prime concern of those who make in-between drawings. So, if you make a drawing with any sort of individuality, it isn't proper . . . I felt strongly that I knew what I was doing, so that at night I was able to do the drawing I wanted to do. I had to maintain a sort of dual identity during that year."

Rapid Transit (1969, 3 min.) is the first film to result from Griffin's nocturnal efforts. It is a work that completely eschews figurative drawings for direct manipulation of three-dimensional materials under the camera, in this case, hundreds of dried black coffee beans on underlit white

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John Canemaker is an independent animator and filmmaker and writer on animation; his article on Elfriede Fischinger appeared in Funnyworld *No. 18. Material for this article was gathered from interviews with George Griffin by the author in 1974 and 1978; from an interview with Griffin by William Rothman in the February 1978 issue of the University Film Study* Newsletter, *and from an unpublished article ("Cartoon, Anti-Cartoon") written by Griffin in 1977.*

Most of George Griffin's films are available for rental and purchase from Serious Business Company, 1145 Mandana Blvd., Oakland, California 94610, (415) 832-5600.

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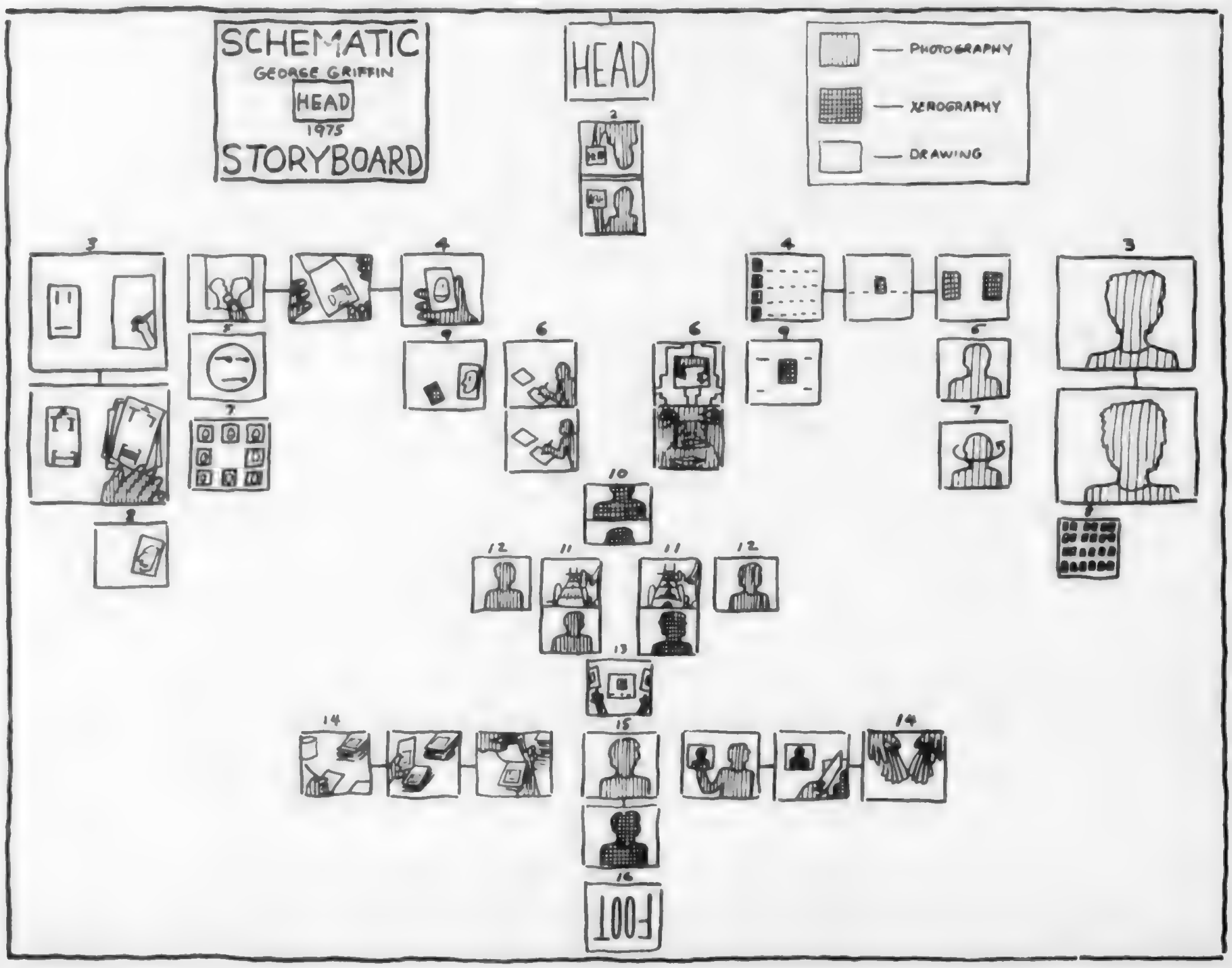
plexiglass. Griffin found this "edible animation" a very satisfying process that fundamentally changed his notion of drawing by forcing him to "deal with the problem of drawing in time."

During this period of self-discovery and exploration, Griffin was "living frugally. And when I was as poor as I could possibly be, I went in with two other guys and formed a film collective in a loft in Chinatown called Metropolis Photoplays. My partners and I produced a 35mm, seventeen-minute theatrical cartoon, *One Man's Laundry* (1971), which was one and a half years of steady sweat." *The New York Times* found the film a "very ambitious, satiric, fictional cartoon." Drawn in watercolors and utilizing cel techniques, it is Griffin's most conventional personal film, one he now finds stylistically "conservative and crude."

The Candy Machine (1972, 4 min.) departs from traditional narrative structure to depict paranoia in the subway and allows Griffin to explore the stylistic potential of combining Xerography of live-action with animation. (Griffin wrote a detailed explanation of this special technique in the October 1972 issue of *Filmmakers Newsletter*, pp., 52-54.) Griffin bagan contributing animated spots to CTW's *Electric Company* and animating public service messages and educational films. With income from free-lance work, he purchased a 35/16 mm animation compound (interestingly enough, from the Bray studio) to aid his experimentation and independence, and he moved to his current spacious loft.

It was in 1973, when he created a series of three "Trikfilms," that Griffin's ideas about cinema and animation, his enthrallment with the "mystery" of what makes drawings move, and the development of his now "trademark" self-consciousness began to jell. He was influenced by George Dunning's 1971 short, *Damon the Mower*, in which pencil renderings were photographed to reveal the space surrounding the papers and the numbers at the paper's edge; the exposed animation process retains a mysterious quality and remains fascinating, defying explanation. Griffin began to "question formally, through my films, the proposition that animation is, in fact, cinema." He sought inspiration by harkening back to the pre-cinema "philosophical toys" of the 19th Century: zoetropes, kineographs; the sequential still photos of Muybridge and Marey; the mutoscope; the direct drawn-on-film images of Len Lye, Norman McLaren, and Harry Smith. In these illusionary devices that defy the



A frame enlargement from **Head** *(1975).*

technology of cinematography, Griffin found a "potential unity of intention, method, and effect comparable to painting, but with the added dimension of time." In other words, as Griffith once put it, "the future is in going back to zoetropes."

In *Trikfilm 3* (1973, 3½ min.), Griffin illustrated artistic unity, touching wryly on the artist's struggle with his muse while revealing the mechanism behind the magic illusion of animation. We first see in live-action, a close-up of the artist's working space: his coffee cup, full ashtray, flipbook and pencil resting on a tabletop. The artist's presence is signalled on the soundtrack by his smoker's cough and his clattering in the background. Pixillation shows his hands picking up the pencil to tap out a thoughtful tattoo on the pad. He puts the pencil down, sips his coffee. Inspired again, up comes the pencil like a phallic barometer measuring degrees of creative motivation. The pad is opened, there is nervous tapping with the pencil. Down it goes again, then up. Finally, the hands force the pencil to speedily draw sequential sketches upon the sheets of the flipbook. To Bach's *Well Tempered Clavier*, the drawings appear full-size on the screen. Griffin cross-cuts rapidly and often between the hand now madly sketching away full of confidence and the full blown result: metamorphosing water, Mayan architecture and fornicating skyscrapers. This modern parody of the Fleischer Out-of-the-Inkwell series ends its animation with the world disappearing to a dot on the dime-store memo pad and a cut to the live-action—a stumbling hand-held shot trucking away from the artist's area revealing the camera, lights, flipbook, pencil and coffee cup on the camera stand, as the sated artist is heard to shuffle away.

"I pretend to show how animation is done," Griffin has said, "but that is part of the illusion, the trick itself. The projector is a source of great magic for me—a magic lantern. Sitting in a room watching the screen, reality is transformed. You are in a trance. I suspected fims were projected dreams before I knew of the technology. And now that I have mastered the technology, I'm convinced."

Head (1975, 10½ min.) is a further, more relentless exploration of form, process, and self-referential animation. Griffin's portrait, which had shyly poked through coffee-bean mandalas in his first film, is here presented front, center, and finale in sync live-action, Xeroxed photomat mug shots, and animated caricatures. As Griffin has described it, "the animator, an actor, lives through his drawings which in turn become actors who influence his own self-image." The film

overflows with optical illusions and filmic allusions; for instance, Griffin, in live-action close-up, gives out with a large sneeze. The image repeats itself in Xerography and one is reminded of Fred Ott's nasal explosion for Edison's camera in 1893. The next cut reveals a roll of Xeroxed photos of Griffin's sneeze being whirled by (in pixillation) on two editing rewinds, reminiscent of the mutoscope device used in 1911 by Winsor McCay for testing his paper drawings before they were photographed.

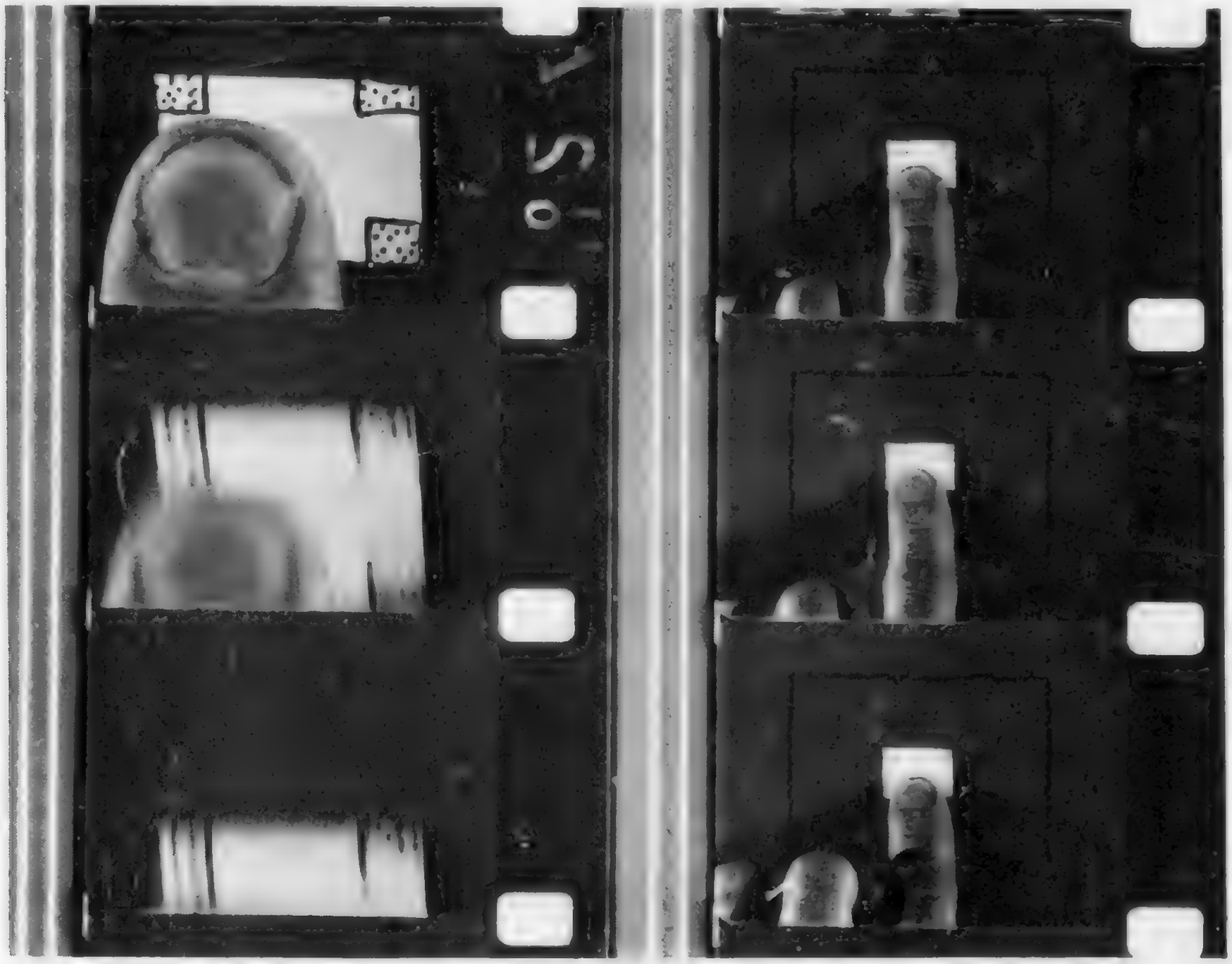
Viewmaster (1976, 3½ min.) is Griffin's *hommage* to Eadweard Muybridge's pre-cinema studies of humans and animals in motion. A cycle of eight drawings, rendered in a variety of styles and media from watercolors to soft pencil to hard line, pan a line-up of animated runners past the camera—happy ink blobs, nude cartoon couples, an army of stick-figure waiters, a Fleischer-esque fatty chased by spear-carriers, disembodied legs, etc. The final shot of this cinepoem on movement and design reveals all the characters to be running on a large circular disk. Muybridge's running man appears briefly in the center, jogging vigorously as he has for nearly a century.

It is difficult to describe George Griffin's film in print. They come off sounding like coldly intellectual, mechanical exercises. In truth, they are witty, often whimsical works, ingenious and engrossing. They are, above all, personal—a visual x-ray of an inquisitive artist's mind. As the cliche goes, one must see Griffin's work in order to become a believer. Only then can one saturate oneself in the colorful quilting effects of the silent *Step Print* (1976, 7 min.); or witness the magic dancing flipbook on the tip of Griffin's digit in *Thumbnail Sketches* (1977, 7 min.), a tiny drawing that can be displaced by the mere shadow of Griffin's finger. In *Block Print* (1977, silent, 17 min.), Griffin shares a walk around a New York City block in real time and space and a subsequent restructuring and manipulation of the walk in animation. In *The Club* (1975, 4½ min.) we voyeuristically observe pompous, privileged penises, ponderously padding about posh private premises, a jocular take-off (pun intended) on male bonding and sexual discrimination.

The southern area of the roomy Griffin/Cooper loft contains a sunlit kitchen, bedrooms, "living room" with comfortable stuffed antique chairs and sofa, and Karen Cooper's office. Stepping from the self-run industrial elevator in the northern part of the loft, one enters George Griffin's studio area, an organized clutter of drawings and photos pinned to the walls, shelves of books, a completely equipped editing bench, and illuminated drawing boards. Behind heavy black curtains, hiding from the northern sunlight streaming

through the windows, is a large animation stand and camera. Atop one file cabinet rests an eerie multiplex hologram of a rotary cube lifted from *Step Print*.

Griffin was tinkering with a topless box that contained a three-dimensional miniature set, a couple of "windows" on one side of the set, a rear-projection screen on the set's back wall (a projector with film was poised behind the screen outside the box) and a flat, jointed puppet sitting at a small "control" box. A Bolex, fortified with lights, faced the entire



From Thumbnail Sketches *(1977).*

set-up, ready to record the scene in single frames. The usually articulate Griffin found it difficult to describe this work-in-progress. Speaking in a stream-of-consciousness, he attempted to sort out the creative chaos in his own mind: "It will be a long film, maybe in three parts—a continued questioning of art-making. It also deals with consciousness and memory, the screen here will recall a past life. The puppet/artist will alter the screen images."

Griffin paused and released the rear-projection film: colored abstractions animated in white space. "The windows in the set are there as an escape hatch into documentary or narrative," he continued. "The film will deal more with meaning, less with process. The audience will identify with the character, I hope, and the whole thing will flow." Weary from the gamble and responsibility inherent in the act of creating an experimental film, Griffin admitted feeling, "This is like starting on a voyage to the middle of a desert!"

Looking beyond this current project, which he thinks will require a year of work, Griffin addressed himself to future projects for himself that might involve other independent animators. He spoke of several independents working together on one project, perhaps a feature, which might concern "politics" and "what is happening in the world." Admitting that the process of utilizing the individualistic talents of several unique animation artists with their own style and media preferences is problematic, Griffin suggested the film might be various interpretations of one story or a collection of tales based on one theme.

Griffin flipped through the pages of *Frames*, smiling at the variety of graphic signatures available in the work of the new independent animators. "You can't really dabble in animation," he commented. "You have to be obsessed, inspired, taken with it! I've never felt the water with my toes, I've always jumped in. One problem I've found with students is their concern that they can't draw, or what about those cels, and how much does paint cost. These are minor things. They should get a Super-8 camera and animate things—garbage, themselves, anything. You don't even need a camera—draw directly onto film, make a flipbook. Question the rules!"

Griffin returned to the miniature set. "I make a living making animated films," he said in conclusion. "That doesn't satisfy me. What does satisfy me is developing something that is uniquely mine."

Going by the Book

By MIKE BARRIER

When *The Lord of the Rings* and *Watership Down* were released within a few weeks of one another last fall, they attracted more attention than any animated features since Walt Disney's earliest such efforts, forty years before. Critics who would normally have only nodded in an animated film's direction devoted many column inches to *Watership* and *Rings*, usually treating them as a pair, and only rarely reviewing them separately. Of the most widely read critics, only *The New Yorker*'s Pauline Kael let the two features pass without comment.

The result of all this attention cannot be called a renaissance of the animated feature. Both films were widely panned, *Rings* especially. Neither's boxoffice receipts will rival those of *Star Wars*, although both seem to have performed respectably enough. If doors, and minds, have not opened wide for those who are proposing animated features to prospective backers, at least they have not slammed shut.

In short, it is almost as if *Watership Down* and *The Lord of the Rings* had never been released at all.

That is probably because neither film is really animated. Their directors have been the ones most at pains to point this out, although Martin Rosen of *Watership Down* has not gone quite as far as Ralph Bakshi of *Rings*, who told one interviewer: "Stop calling me animation. I hate animation! I want to be real!"

Both *Watership* and *Rings* are very stupid movies, of a special kind. That is not to say that the people who made them are stupid, only that the films themselves show no sign that any intelligence was at work in making them. They were both intended as faithful transcriptions of books, and they are both destroyed by a grim literalism that would do credit to the Ayatollah Khomeini.

There are certain people—usually they are adolescents, chronologically or emotionally, and usually they don't read very much—who become enamored of certain books, and who talk about them, and clutch them to their bosoms, as if they were holy writ. Bakshi and Rosen have talked about the books that were their sources as if they regarded them in just this way, and their films certainly look like the products of pubescent enthusiasms.

Watership Down is the least offensive of the two, because it was drawn, and not traced. Most of *Watership*'s animators usually work on television commercials in England, and seeing their animation here, in its crudity, and with its graceless execution of even the simplest efforts at characterization through movement, one can understand why Richard Williams (who has done most of his work in England) has gotten in the habit of drawing as well as directing many of the films he makes. If *Watership* is a measure of the talent available to him, he has had no choice. *Watership Down* comes to life only when it forsakes literalism—simply reproducing scenes from Richard Adams' novel—for metaphor. The film's prologue is the outstanding example of this; Holly's account of the destruction of the warren is another.

These sequences, and a few other bits and pieces throughout the film, strongly suggest the hand of the late John Hubley, who was director of the film in 1975 and 1976 before breaking with Rosen. The prologue, in particular, is pure Hubley; Michael Sporn, who once worked for Hubley, tells me that its design is rooted in the art of the Australian aborigines. It is jarring to pass from the prologue to the opening scene of the film itself, in which a badly drawn rabbit twitches an unbelievable nose and blinks an equally unconvincing eye.

Rosen has said little to interviewers about what led to his split with Hubley, but what he *has* said is hard to credit. For example, he told one interviewer that Hubley, after a year of work, had come up with nothing but "a jazz composition score with cute little bunnies with big eyelashes." No one who has seen very many of Hubley's films could believe that. It seems more likely that Hubley wanted to approach the film in a relatively loose, impressionistic way—as if it were a film, and he a director—rather than in the devotional mood Rosen required. Fortunately, Rosen left enough of Hubley in the film to permit us to gauge how differently the two men approached the film: Rosen's rabbits merely bleed; it is Hubley's rabbits, in their few minutes of screen time, who live and die.

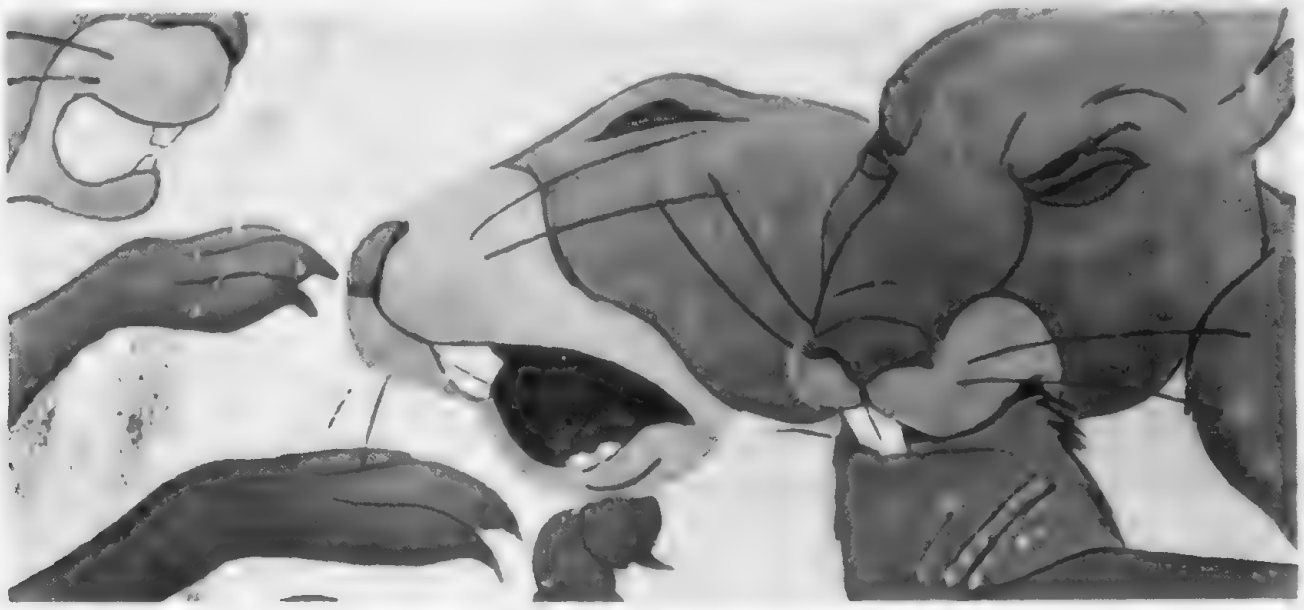
Rosen has denied that any of Hubley's work remains in the film, but our eyes tell us otherwise. Likewise, Rosen has talked of pencil testing the sequence on the destruction of the warren nine times before approving it, but it is difficult for me to believe that the same mind gave us this sequence as well as all of those sequences in which violence is presented so unimaginatively.

"The investors were unhappy, and so was I," Rosen has said of Hubley. "I gave him an ultimatum—abandon the project or start over completely." Whatever the precise form of what happened next, the gist of it was that Hubley was fired. Rosen himself became director, even though he had no experience whatever in animation. The point is, however, that one would not need experience in animation to make the kind of film he has made: a series of tableaux, "scenes from *Watership Down*," intelligible only to those who have already read the book.

Ralph Bakshi came to *The Lord of the Rings* with plenty of experience in animation; he has worked in the field

for more than twenty years, since joining Terrytoons fresh out of high school. Nevertheless, his version of *The Lord of the Rings* suffers from precisely the same defects as Rosen's *Watership Down*, and has a multitude of shortcomings of its own. Like Rosen, Bakshi has merely pared away chunks of a book in order to squeeze it into a reasonable running time (in this case, a stupefying two hours and fifteen minutes); there has been no effort to make a coherent whole of what is left.

Perhaps we should be grateful that



From Watership Down.

Bakshi did not try to make the material more his own, for there is no evidence that the film would have been improved by the effort. For example, at the start, when Gandalf and Frodo are talking about the fateful ring, and about what Frodo must do with it, Bakshi sends them both out of doors, at night, evidently afraid that leaving them indoors would be too static. This is, in the first place, a pitiful confession of insecurity and ineptitude; a director who cannot keep the screen alive during a few minutes of crucial dialogue is not much of a director. But beyond that, it destroys the effect that Tolkien achieved in the book; there, the meeting with Gandalf takes place in daylight, in a cozy Hobbit dwelling, and the comfort and security of the surroundings are used in counterpoint to Gandalf's chilling message. Subtleties of this kind—or of any kind—are simply beyond Bakshi's grasp.

Bakshi is worse at putting together a coherent narrative than he ever was before. *The Lord of the Rings* is a terrible muddle for those who do not know the Tolkien trilogy by heart. I was re-reading the trilogy at the time I saw the film, and I found that once past the point in the film that I had reached in my reading, I had a lot of trouble figuring out what was going on. Bakshi, typically, has tried to make a virtue of this crippling flaw, by declaring that he made the film for Tolkien's fans, and not for "the mass audience." But if my experience is any guide, even those who are reasonably familiar with the story had to struggle to keep up. There were devices that Bakshi could have used—titles and, especially, maps—that would have been entirely appropriate (there is a map in each volume of the trilogy), and would have made it much easier for everyone (devotees and non-devotees alike) to understand what was going on.

When the film simply stops, without coming to a conclusion of any kind, it is obvious that Bakshi has not made any effort to give shape to his material, but has simply chopped it off at a convenient spot. I have already suggested that it is Bakshi's weaknesses as a director that make the film so hard to follow, but this arbitrary ending suggests something more: that Bakshi's inadequacies are reinforced by a contempt for his audience, to such an extent that they are probably incurable. Bakshi is a talented man, but his talent has been bested by demons whose nature I can only guess at, and it is inconceivable that he will ever produce any films of enduring worth.

The Lord of the Rings was more than just another bad film, however; it was a potentially dangerous film, because of the way that Bakshi made it, by relying almost entirely on rotoscoping—the tracing of live actors. Rotoscoping is already too widespread, and if Bakshi had made more effective use of it, real animation—drawings that originate in an animator's mind, and not in a photostatic frame blow-up—might have been even more on the defensive than it already is. Fortunately, Bakshi's use of rotoscoping was just as stupid as the film as a whole, and I know of no one who thinks that Bakshi has opened a road to a new form of "animated film," except possibly for Bakshi himself. (Bakshi proclaimed the uniqueness of his rotoscoping for months—he is an old hand at this kind of hokum—before finally admitting that it was the *quantity* of the rotoscoping in his film, and not the rotoscoping itself, that was remarkable.)

Although Bakshi's staff was made up largely of young people fresh from art school, with no experience in animation, most of the scenes involving the main characters were handled by people who had worked as animators or assistant animators. Not that it made much difference, since the rotoscoping is, like the film itself, very literal-minded. The animators traced the action, but they added nothing to it, apart from drawing the characters "on model." For most scenes, an animator named Dale Baer would make one or two key drawings over the photostats, and the other animators would use Baer's drawings as the guides for their own tracings.

The results are peculiar in many respects. In the Disney studio's great days, animators working from photostats of this kind would have used them only as general guides, but Bakshi's animators followed them exactly, no matter how ludicrous the results. We have, for example, a "Dwarf" who is obviously a tracing of a man who is of normal height, and a "Hobbit" who is obviously a real dwarf.

Bakshi has proved on earlier occasions that he cannot direct actors, and he proved it again in shooting the live-action for *Rings*. Under the

drawings, we can see actors who move only in cliches, because Bakshi can get nothing else from them.

Typically, Bakshi has tried to pretend that such sow's ears are silk purses. Other animators have caricatured the action in rotoscoping it, he has said with obvious disapproval, but his "animators" were faithful to the action in the photographs. Pressed to explain why this method is superior to simply shooting the film in live-action, he has come up with no persuasive answer; the best he can do is to say that rotoscoping gives him a degree of "control" that live-action would not.

From The Lord of the Rings.

Actually there is one slender reed that Bakshi could have leaned on. Many of the creatures in the film are fantastic—the Orcs and the Balrog are prime examples—and traced versions of these characters would probably have looked better than live actors in funny suits. However, it is the human and almost-human characters who are traced; the Orcs and the Balrog are presented in a form of rotoscoping that looks like high-contrast live-action photography, but is actually the product of the labors of Bakshi's young art-school recruits.

Bakshi made a great point, at a press conference in New York just before the film opened, of saying that even the scenes with hordes of Orcs were on cels, as if this meant anything. He was right, though. The high-contrast look was achieved this way: Bakshi's artists would touch up the photostats with Stabilo pencils, making the outlines more definite. Painters would paint solid white around the forms of the people and the horses, obscuring the backgrounds. These touched-up and painted photostats would then be Xeroxed onto cels; the cels would be touched up to restore lines that had been lost in the painting or the Xeroxing. The cels would then be painted like normal animation cels.

Bakshi has tried to justify this procedure on artistic grounds—"The only difference was whether it was rotoscoped with shadows or whether it was rotoscoped in clean line. Most of the heavies Orcs and such—I used the shadows, because they were Mordorish"—but plainly costs and not esthetics were controlling. Bakshi could get crowds of Orcs on the screen more cheaply by using touched-up photostats than by having those photostats traced. The effect is ugly, and the effort futile; Bakshi is such a clumsy director that even his scenes with hundreds of extras in cheap Halloween costumes look underpopulated.

Bakshi said in a radio interview that he received 25,000 applications for positions on staff; even given his usual tendency to puff up fact and figures, it seems likely that he did receive thousands of applications, and there must have been hundreds of aspiring young artists who worked on the film (the staff's size was usually put at around one hundred and fifty, but there was a lot of turnover). One wonders what those young people thought of the work, and what they think of the finished product. And one wonders what they think of Bakshi, the fellow who, in a 1977 advertisement in *Variety*, offered "creative careers" to young artists.

If *The Lord of the Rings* has served any purpose, it may have been to make clear just why rotoscoping is so unsatisfactory as an animator's tool: it makes the indefinite definite, but in a random way.

We do not see people as line drawings; we see them as three-dimensional objects whose outlines may not be at all distinct, unless they are standing against a brightly lit background. Good drawings are necessarily abstractions, because they present human figures as arrangments of lines, and we do not see human beings that way. The lines may be arranged in many ways, to suggest the impression that our brains receive when we see a real person, or as a frankly two-dimensional pattern that has only a tenuous relationship with the ostensible subject. But in each case, the result is nothing like a tracing from a photograph. Such a tracing, even though superficially faithful to the outlines of the figure, is likely to leave out precisely what is most clearly visible to us when we see the figure itself—the contours and textures that can be recreated in line by a skilled draftsman.

Paradoxically, rotoscoped figures—with their crisp outlines—are disorienting and unpleasant in the same way that an out-of-focus film is: we keep straining to see what is missing, and we wind up with a headache. Bakshi's approach to rotoscoping, using untrained artists and misdirected actors, simply guaranteed that the inevitably poor results would look even worse than necessary.

Bakshi's retreat from real animation—to which he seemed so committed a few years ago—has now turned into headlong flight, and it's tempting to wonder why. Perhaps there is a clue in what he said at his New York press conference about the difficulties of rotoscoping characters that are moving rapidly:

"When horses come charging by the cameras, and you look at the photographs, and they blur, there's nothing there. When masses of men are moving, your eye picks out the details, but the camera does not; they kind of blend into an overall gray, there are virtually no lines to look at when the Orcs are coming over the horizon at

you. Fast feet—feet moving very fast, too close to the camera, distort. And very subtle moves on a realisitic character like Aragorn are very tough to do. When do you stop moving him? You're all sitting here, but if you check your motion, it's very subtle . . . If I did this scene here in animation, and held it as still as you're all sitting, somebody would say it was limited animation, I wasn't moving anything, I was cheating, when in reality there's very little motion out there. Those were the problems that I ran into. When do you not move and not make it look cheap? When do you *not* move, realistically, because realistic characters don't move all the time. If you kept it moving, like the old rotoscope methods did, it would move endlessly. We don't move all the time, and that's a problem in animation; it's not a problem in photography, but it's a serious problem in animation."

Setting aside the possibility that Bakshi was talking down to his audience—always a possibility with Bakshi--the ignorance revealed here is simply incredible, especially for someone who has been in the animation business as long as Bakshi has. Bakshi talks as if he were surprised to find that frames of film, can look very different, taken individually, than they look when thrown on a movie screen at twenty-four frames per second. Yet animators *must* be aware of this, if their work is to come to life; the effective use of stretch and squash, in particular, depends on knowing how to combine radically dissimilar drawings to produce a single pleasing impression.

This does not mean that animators hae devised methods to do what the live-action camera does automatically; rather, they have had to find ways to make their moving drawings just as "real" as live-action, but in a distinctively animated way. Take the problem of keeping the held pose "alive." This is no problem in live-action, because we all breathe and move in little ways that keep us "alive" and moving even when we are sitting still. But because animated characters—even the most realistically drawn—are abstractions, any such little movements would seem fussy. Other solutions have to be found, and depending on the particular case, they can be as simple as an eye-blink or as elaborate as a

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complex cycle.

Bakshi has in effect discarded all such hard-won lessons from animation's past and replaced them with a single rule: find the line to be traced. I suspect that real animation is simply too demanding and difficult for him; he has been in over his head, and now, in rotoscoping, he has found his own special kind of kiddie pool.

We are now promised an animated version of *The Plague Dogs*, Richard Adams' most recent novel, from Martin Rosen, and two films from Ralph Bakshi: *American Pop*, another exercise in rotoscoped "animation," and *If I Catch Her, I'll Kill Her*, a live-action "socio-political" comedy to be written and directed by Bakshi. Bakshi has not lost his magic touch with studios and distributors; Paramount will distribute *American Pop*, and Orion—the new company headed by the former top brass at United Artists—is behind *If I Catch Her*.

The second half of *The Lord of the Rings*, if it ever appears, is years away. I doubt that we will ever see it, since Bakshi—after two fantasy films, *Wizards* and *Rings*—seems determined to get back to contemporary material like that in *Fritz the Cat* and *Heavy Traffic*, the two films that made his reputation. If his live-action comedy is successful, I would not be surprised to see Bakshi forsake animation all together. Such a consummation is devoutly to be wished, but it seems unlikely, because Bakshi's record as a live-action director is so poor.

I am afraid that animation is stuck with him, however much everyone concerned may want a divorce.

The Animation of 'Rings'

By MARK KAUSLER

With the completion of *The Lord of the Rings*, Ralph Bakshi has accomplished something unique. He has produced the first *synthetic* animated feature. Much of the film was drawn by hand, but the thought processes behind good animation were supplanted by the rotoscope. Almost the entire film was shot in live action first, then traced or photostated onto the cels, with the exception of an underwater scene after the live-action silhouette prologue and the "Treebeard" sequence, animated by Irv Spence.

It is difficult to discuss the "animation" of *The Lord of the Rings* without a few comments on the handling of Tolkien's story. I must admit that I have not read the entire *Rings* trilogy. I bogged down half-way through *The Two Towers* after slogging through what semed to be elaborate descriptions of unnecessary battles and meaningless Middle Earth history. I have always felt that a film version of *The Hobbit* would be more enjoyable to watch than *Rings* because *The Hobbit* is a more intimate story and the characters seem more alive.

Rankin-Bass has already produced its *Hallmark*-greeting-card version of *The Hobbit*, so Ralph could not use the book. Perhaps he was more comfortable with the epic scope of *Rings*, because he was able to hide his inability to understand the characters and spirit of the books behind a smokescreen of elaborate photostated battle scenes, rotoscope, and phony publicity.

For the first ten minutes of the picture, the animation of *The Lord of the Rings* had an other-worldly, unsettling hypnotic effect on me. I never realized that actors moved their hands so much when they talk, or walk up and down so many times, or wave their arms about in such a distracting fashion. Then after the novelty value of the rotoscoping began to fade, I realized that the inappropriate movements of the characters were due to inadequate direction of the live actors. Bakshi's actors must have known that they were to be changed into animated characters later on, because they move a little too much in some situations, and not enough in others. Gandalf is like an actor playing to someone in the forty-fifth row of an opera house, not like an actor playing to a motion picture camera. Bilbo is essentially Billy Barty, because that's who posed for the rotoscope. Frodo is Sharon Baird and doesn't move like a dwarf, but more like a teen-age boy. Are we expected to believe that two Hobbits, who are supposed to be the same type of creature, would move and act so differently from each other? Using Barty, a dwarf, to pose for Bilbo, makes no sense in terms of Middle Earth; Hobbits and Dwarfs are *not* the same creatures.

A Tolkien scholar could probably find hundreds of other inconsistencies in the film version of *The Lord of the Rings*, but that's just the point. A non-Tolkien scholar would have a difficult time making *any* sense of the film. Many of its main story points depend on prior knowledge of the books, making the picture a series of animated illustrations for the books, rather than something that will stand up by itself and communicate clearly. Perhaps this problem was unavoidable in any attempt to shoehorn all of the incidents and characters of the *Rings* trilogy into two hours (soon to be two more hours).

Two of the most glaring technical problems in the animation of *The Lord of the Rings* are the registration of the cels to the backgrounds, and the in-betweening of the rotoscoped extremes.

The registration problems are usually in the North-South drift of the characters when a live-action frame has been blown up to 10½ x 12 inches for the animators to trace or draw over. The slightest fraction of a millimeter's variation in position when the film goes through the enlarger frame by frame will show up on the screen as an up-and-down unsteadiness of the characters against their backgrounds. This contributes to the unsettling feeling that

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Mark Kausler is a Hollywood-based animator whose reviews of The Rescuers *and* Pete's Dragon *appeared in* Funnyworld *No. 18.*

Funnyworld Back Issues

Funnyworld started out as a rather informal type of production it was a mimeographed newsletter for a small group of enthusiasts. As time went on, its format and scope changed, and its circulation went up. Issues #1 through #11 were originally mimeographed, while the others were offset printed. The notes on each issue are only a guide. Most issues include letters and reviews. Issues #1 through #16 are out of print, so we will send you photocopies.

Issues 1 through 5
1941-1966 Warner Bros. Cartoon Comic Book Index; review of **A Sign For Cain** by Frederic Wertham; Roy Rogers Visits Little Rock Arkansas; Funny Animal Quiz; Our Gang Comic Index; other Dell Gold Key comic indexes; Disney's Death. 60 pages (October 1966 through April 1967).

Issues 6 through 8
These issues are almost totally devoted to the Carl Barks Bibliography. 92 pages (June 1967 through December 1967).

Issues #9 and #10
More Barks material; a speech by Chuck Jones entitled, "Animation, the Naked Art". 99 pages (May 1968 through November 1968).

Issue #11
More Barks material. 73 pages (May 1969).

Issue #12
Notes on underground comics; interview with Bob Clampett; more Barks material. 50 pages (1970).

Issue #13
Interview with Chuck Jones; interview with Carl Stalling; more Barks material; Milt Gray on the impact of computer animation and home video cassettes. 56 pages. (1971).

Issue #14
The Filming of **Fritz the Cat**; reviews of underground comics; I. Klein on his first job at the Hearst studio; Ub Iwerks, 1901-1971, by David Smith; more Barks material. 50 pages (1972).

Issue #15
The Filming of **Fritz the Cat**, Part II; Katz's Catastrophe by John Fawcett; Tex Avery article, by Joe Adamson. **Heavy Traffic**; more Barks material. 50 pages (1973).

Issue #16
More Barks material; Working for the Fleischers -- An Interview With Dick Huemer; Underground Comics in Europe. 44 pages (1974).

Issue #17
The Disney Studio During WW II; Roy Williams interview; Dick Huemer's work with Disney. 50 pages (1977).

Issue #18
Oscar Fischinger, by John Canemaker; column by Dick Huemer; animation voices over the last 50 years; the composers for Disney's shorts, by Ross Care. 54 pages (Summer 1978).

Issue #19
Richard Williams Animating Frank Frazetta; Eric Knight at Disney's Studio; reviews of the Ottawa and Filmex festivals; Disney's Kansas City studio. 56 pages (Fall 1978).

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the characters are not standing on the backgrounds, but floating on top of them. It would have been a simple matter to run tests of the rotoscope stats and re-peg them to make sure that the feet did not float, but evidently there was no time for such basic craftsmanship.

The in-between drawings in many cases look scratched out with no time to really draw the characters or to get the sizes of eyes, ears, noses, hairlines, or the relationships between these facial parts right. This works against the believability of the animation, for it is usually the faces of the characters that an audience watches. Again, this problem may have been due to the rushed production schedule.

In Bakshi's long battle sequences between the Orcs and Aragorn's forces, the film begins to look less and less "animated." When such huge crowd scenes were involved it was evidently cheaper to process the photostats of the live action directly onto cels and draw teeth or red eyes on top of them. This technique can hardly be described as "moving paintings"—as Bakshi refers to them—but is more like tinted photography.

So, Ralph has a new toy. It enables him to completely ignore the animated cartoon and its limitations and freedoms that have shaped his feature films thus far. He never has to hire a full-fledged character animator again. Instead, Ralph can hire an army of anatomy students fresh from art school to "animate" his films for beginning rates. In other words he has moved a step closer to "computer" animation with human parts. These parts will be much easier to replace with other ones should some of them get uppity or quit. If this is the truly new form of film-making that Ralph is claiming it to be, then we need no longer concern ourselves with writing about his films in a journal devoted to animated films. I propose that a new word be invented to describe this new type of film and that we invent a new film magazine especially devoted to Ralph's new films and other pictures that use the new technique.

The Lord of the Rings is merely the logical out-growth of the live-action/animation pictures such as *Hey! Good-Lookin!*, *Coonskin*, and *Heavy Traffic*. In this case it's harder to tell where the live-action stops and the animation starts, which is probably what Ralph was trying for all along.

Donald and Mickey in Hard Covers

By KIM WESTON

Abbeville Press is Harry Abrams' new book company, now that he is no longer associated with the company that bears his name. Two of its first offerings, under the general title "Walt Disney Best Comics," are *Donald Duck*, with an introduction by Carl Barks, and *Mickey Mouse*, with an introduction by Floyd Gottfredson ($14.95 each).

Before I go any further, I should express my opinion that if you like Carl Barks or Donald Duck, you should buy the *Donald Duck* book; if you like Mickey Mouse or Floyd Gottfredson, you should buy the *Mickey Mouse* book. If you are not sure but interested, buy them; they are probably the least expensive large sample of either you are likely to see. I might add that Abbeville is also planning to bring out an *Uncle Scrooge* volume this year in the same format.

The books have been successful in sales. Artistically and for purposes of scholarship, they are flawed. The flaws stem mostly from their origins. In 1971, Arnoldo Mondadori, an Italian publisher, the holder of Disney publishing rights in Italy, published *Io, Paperino* and *Io, Topolino*, and in 1972, *Io, Paperone—I, Donald Duck, I, Mickey Mouse*, and *I, Uncle Scrooge*, respectively. The Abbeville books are partial reprints of those original Italian volumes. Mondadori has been publishing and reissuing old and new Disney material in many formats for many years, both domestically produced and imported from other countries, the USA included. Photostats of the original art are sent to Italy, where the stories are translated and the art cut and pasted to fit the digest format of the comics published there.

So all these Donald Duck stories are reprinted from the Italian digests and the art has been cut and pasted again to fit the eighteen-panels-per-page format of the book. Right away this causes problems. One of the problems was avoided: instead of translating from Italian back into English, someone wisely decided (at least in the *Donald Duck* book) to go back to the original American comics and re-letter the original dialogue for the most part. Occasionally lines of dialogue or captions are dropped or added or changed and in a couple of cases this costs the stories nuances, but for the vast majority, the original words and sense are intact.

The more serious problem is in the art itself. To fit in the digest and then this book, panels were stretched or trimmed, changed in size and/or shape, and sometimes had details dropped. Barks' panels are very carefully composed and this tampering does change the composition. Barks' pages and even half pages are also very carefully composed, often as units building to a point and then releasing. And this page sense is completely destroyed by altering the format. This loss of page sense costs the stories subtle points and shades of meaning. Sometimes this is mainly for humorous effect. Other times the meaning is more dramatically important. An example immediately comes to mind. Perhaps two of Barks' finest pages are in *Donald Duck* Four Color No. 256 (1949), pages 7 and 8, reprinted as panels 7-18 of page 69 and 1-4 of page 70 in the *Donald Duck* book. Much of the impact of those two pages is lost by the destruction of Barks' composition, even though the panels still come one after the other in the proper order.

As presented here, there is a

Kim Weston is a Carl Barks scholar whose article on Barks' unpublished work appeared in Funnyworld *No. 16.*

significant loss which invalidates this book as a reference for serious scholarship. However there is so much that remains that the book can be recommended without reservation to the casual reader or to the Barks fan for purposes of reading for enjoyment.

As I write this review I have not read all the stories *in* the book, though I have read them in their original incarnations several times. I did, however, go through the book, comparing it with the original comic books and noting changes. In all stories there are, as mentioned earlier, minor alterations in dialogue and stretching and trimming of panels. In "Frozen Gold" (from Four Color No. 62, 1944), the splash panel is dropped. In "Maharajah Donald" (from *March of Comics* No. 4, 1947, and reason enough to buy the book in and of itself), two panels are dropped (panel 5 of page 6 and panel 5 of page 23). In "Luck of the North," panel 6 of page 30 is flipped (left to right), panel 1 of page 31 is dropped, and page 2 is dropped. The loss of this whole page is, however, a less serious flaw than the previously mentioned problem with pages 7 and 8. The addition of the page only serves to make Gladstone's incredible good luck even more galling, as if that were possible. "Land of the Totem Poles" (from Four Color No. 263, 1949) loses only panel 3 of page 4. "The Magic Hour Glass" (from Four Color No. 291, 1950), "Christmas for Shacktown" (from Four Color No. 367, 1951), "Only a Poor Old Man" (from Four Color No. 386, 1952), "The Golden Helmet" (from Four Color No. 408, 1952), and "The Gilded Man" (from Four Color No. 422, 1952) have no cut panels, although in "The Gilded Man," panel 5 of page 20 has been shifted to a position between panels 2 and 3; the change is not serious. Only the second story in the volume, "Lost in the Andes" (from Four Color No. 223, 1949) is seriously harmed, and that story is truly butchered. If you have access to it in another form, skip it in this incarnation. Perhaps the most serious cut is the dropping of the last page, which causes the story to end on a different note, but many panels are dropped.

I mentioned earlier that the two books are partial reprints of Italian books. The Italian Donald Duck book also includes the following stories: "Voodoo Hoodoo" (from Four Color No. 263, 1949); "Letter to Santa" (from *Christmas Parade* No. 1, 1949), "Dangerous Disguise" (from Four Color No. 308, 1950), "The Seven Cities of Cibola" (from *Uncle Scrooge* No. 7, Sept.-Nov. 1954), and "The Golden Fleecing" (from *Uncle Scrooge* No. 12, Dec.-Feb. 1956).

A friend of mine who owns the Italian originals and reads and speaks the language fluently tells me that the Italian books also have the added problem of poor translation of Barks' original words (a flaw which he says does *not* harm the Mickey Mouse volume, in fact, he prefers the Mouse strips in Italian).

The Mickey Mouse book's flaws are less serious to my eye. Ten stories from the daily Mickey Mouse and one from the Sundays are reprinted. I don't have a run of Mickey Mouse strips to compare the book with but the Italian book reprints translations of the daily strips and this has had English re-lettered back in. I hope it is the original rather than a re-translation but I don't know for sure. Assuming it is the original dialogue returned, we have lost only the original lettering, not a serious flaw in my opinion. The format is apparently six daily strips to a page (9½ x 23), a little small perhaps, but no smaller than most newspapers of today. There are some places where strips have been dropped or panels have been dropped. How extensive this is I don't know, but it appears to be mainly at the beginning or end of stories where there are more gags and less continuity at the transition between stories. Other places the dates are on the strips and long runs are published intact. This volume, too, has defects which inhibit its usefulness as a resource for scholarship, but I can see no reason why it should not be read for fun and as a good survey of Gottfredson's Mickey Mouse strip from 1930 to 1937.

Volumes suitable for scholarly research have not yet reached us but perhaps the success of these two books

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will open the door. To be frank, I would like to see these volumes allowed to go out of print after a year or so *to be replaced* by more carefully prepared volumes. Already I have heard of a Barks volume in the works which will reprint several stories one page to the page and a bit larger than the original comic-book size.

I have no objections to the size of these volumes, but for the Donald Duck stories, comic book size would be acceptable, though I think larger is better. With Barks, reprinting of his work in the original format, one page to the page, is an absolute necessity; sensitively applied color is desirable but by no means necessary. Tone and shading applied in lieu of color (as with the Warren *Spirits*) is unacceptable—but straight reprinting of the original black and white art would be very fine indeed.

For Mickey Mouse, I would be delighted to see three strips to a page in volumes bound on the short side (as in the Nostalgia Press *Terry and the Pirates*). However one week to a page as in the present volume, *but from the original American strips* (or proofs thereof) would also be quite acceptable and artistically and scholastically valid if no strips were omitted. In Italy, the 1930 to 1945 strips have been reprinted in Italian in 33 paperbound volumes of *Topolino d'Oro*—The Golden Age Mickey Mouse. There are occasional omissions even in those books, but far fewer. In Germany, the Comic Book Club has so far reprinted in English 18 portfolios (almost 1,000 pages) of Barks stories, mostly from negatives of the original art and the project (to reprint all of Barks' comic-book work) is continuing at the rate of about 1 folio per month. If these two Abbeville Press volumes help lay the ground for such projects in the USA, they should be given a hearty welcome despite their flaws. And despite their flaws, you should buy them and read them.

Two Kinds of Disney Book

By MIKE BARRIER

Two new Disney art books were published for Christmas 1978 (in addition to the comics collections reviewed elsewhere in this issue by Kim Weston). They have little in common except for their price, $25.00 in each case.

Walt Disney's Treasury of Children's Classics (Abrams) is a curious book, consisting as it does of re-tellings of the stories of seventeen Disney animated features or featurettes, all of them illustrated lavishly with stills from the films. A brief "production story" is appended to each re-told tale, illustrated with one or two publicity pictures of Disney staff members. However, the "production stories" have obviously been assembled from Disney press releases, and contain no new information. Likewise, most of the stills will be very familiar to anyone who has kept up with Disney books and articles; some of them were used in Abrams' own *Art of Walt Disney*, in 1973.

I am not sure which market the publishers of this book had in mind; it is rather plush (and expensive) for a children's book. For the Disney enthusiast, the book's value must lie in the very familiarity of its materials; it is nice to have all of this lovely and well-loved artwork assembled in one beautifully printed book. Whether the book offers $25.00 worth of pleasure even for the Disney enthusiast is a question that each reader will have to decide for himself.

Walt Disney's America by Christopher Finch (Abbeville Press) is a different kind of book, because it presents itself as something new, rather than as a repackaging of the old and familiar. Finch, in his introduction, describes the book as "an attempt to explore some of the ways in which Walter Elias Disney was formed by America and, in his work, transformed American customs and character into the stuff of universal fantasy."

Be not deceived. The text is simply a reshuffling of the text that Finch provided for *The Art of Walt Disney* in 1973. That book was published by Harry N. Abrams, Inc.; Harry Abrams himself has now moved on to form Abbeville, and *Walt Disney's America* is obviously an attempt to repeat the success of the earlier book.

The Art of Walt Disney had many flaws, but Finch at least did some research, and the book was redeemed in any case by the many examples of production artwork—story sketches, model sheets, animation drawings—that it contained. *Walt Disney's America* has a lot of production artwork, too, but it looks like leftovers from the first book, and it is not as well reproduced. Finch's text shows no signs of any additional research, and in fact it perpetuates errors from *The Art of Walt Disney*, as well as adding a few new ones. (I am told that the Disney Archives did not have the chance to review the new book's text for errors.) In addition, the book leans very heavily on publicity stills—often the same ones that are used in the new Abrams book, *Treasury of Children's Classics*. In every instance in which I made a direct comparison, the Abrams book was the winner hands down. *Walt Disney's America* is not a book that will receive any awards for the quality of its color reproductions.

All told, the new Finch book looks like it was thrown together in a hurry for the Christmas market, with no real effort made to achieve distinction in text, design, reproduction, or especially, the quality and variety of illustrations.

Walt Disney's America does hold one distinct advantage over *Walt Disney's Treasury of Classic Tales*: it contains a few dozen illustrations that have not been reproduced anywhere before, including story sketches for some of the classic Disney cartoons. But in every other respect, the warning *caveat emptor* applies with even more force to the Abbeville book than to the new entry from Abrams.

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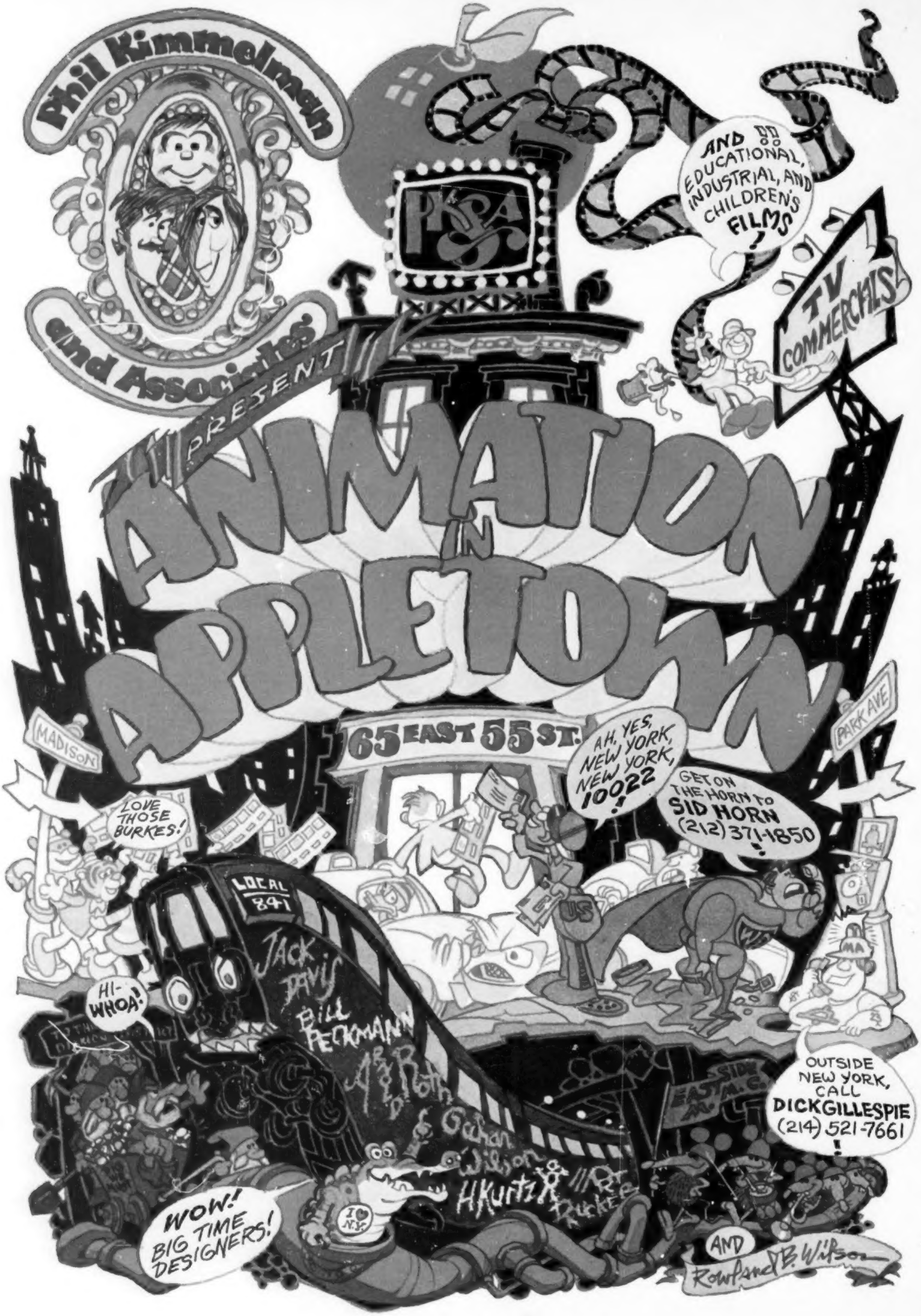
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